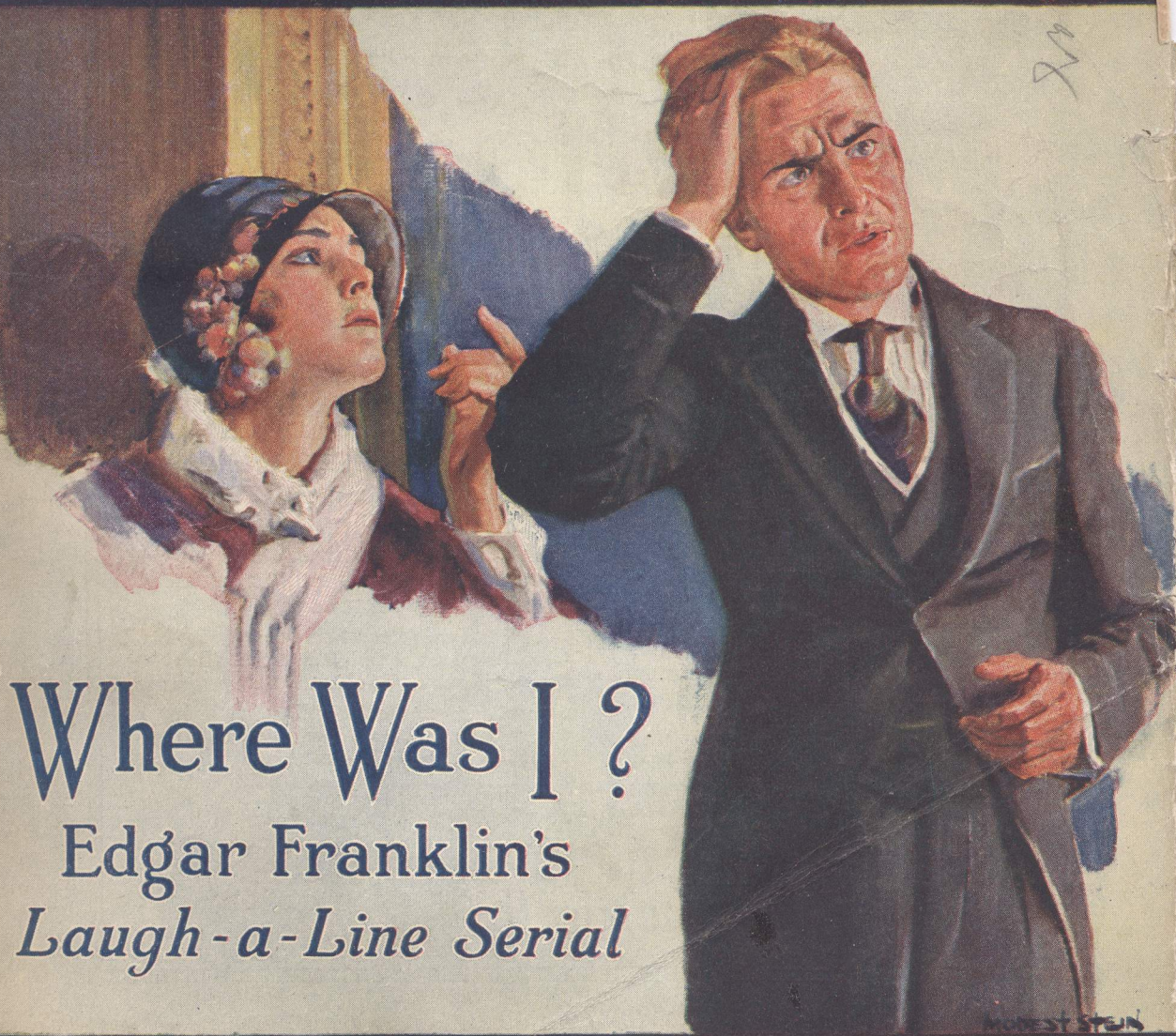


ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY



Where Was I ?

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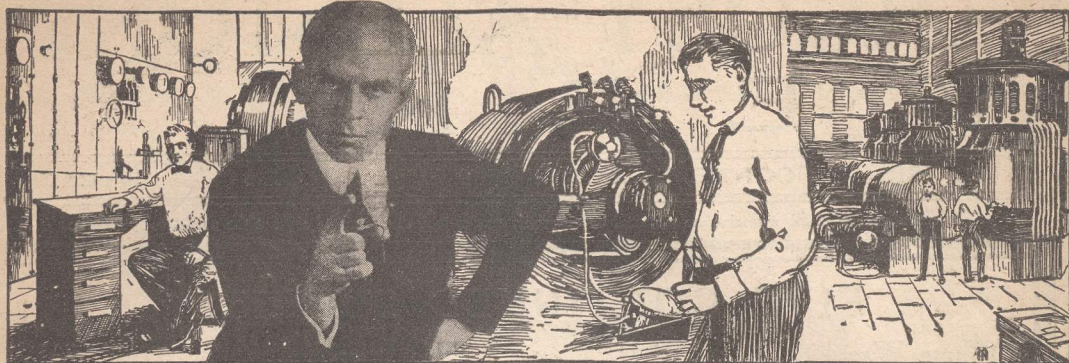
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ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CLXIV

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NUMBER 2

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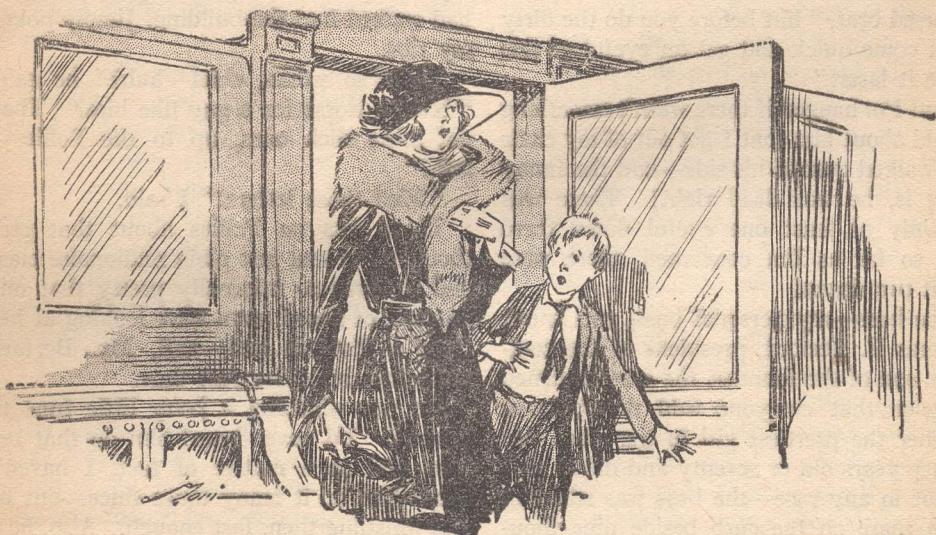
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VOL. CLXIV

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 1924

NUMBER 2



Where Was I?

By **EDGAR FRANKLIN**

Author of "Regular People," "Suitable for Framing," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BIG DAY.

WHEN you have an office boy like Jimmy around, even for the two weeks he lasted, you get into the habit of watching him out of one corner of your eye. I saw him duck back from the window suddenly and then stretch out his neck and stare down again at the street, one floor below. Then he croaked:

"Mr. Morse! Hey, Morse! Come look this over!"

Well, I had been tiring myself all out for

ten minutes, ignoring him; but I had a little strength left and I kept on ignoring him. It didn't work so well. The kid just flapped an arm up and down, beckoning, and he all but yelled:

"No, come! This is on the level! You don't want to miss this!"

Then I looked at him! Without exception, he was the worst thing in the way of a boy that ever got on the pay roll. Most of them spend a lot of time near the windows, because the B. Berford Corporation takes up the whole second floor and there's a good deal to be seen; but Jimmy might

have been glued to the glass eight hours a day. Just then he ought to have been taking out the private office mail and sticking on the stamps.

"Kid," I said, sternly, "if I tell you again to take out that mail, I'm going to speak to the boss and have you canned to-night!"

"That'll be all right, chief," said the accursed brat, "but before you do the dirty work come quick and get an eyeful of this while it lasts!"

And I'm hanged if there wasn't something so odd about him that I got out of my chair and walked over to his side—and the funny thing is, he was dead right! There was certainly at least one eyeful down there and, so far as I'm concerned, there were about two dozen!

The boss—my personal boss, you know, Thomas F. Berford, president of the company, son of the founder, the case-hardened bachelor that everyone said didn't know whether the prettiest girl in the office was twenty years old or seventy and didn't give a hoot in any case—the boss was standing down there on the curb beside nine thousand dollars' worth of pale blue automobile and behind the wheel, all in one chunk, sat about ninety million dollars' worth of girl. More, he was holding her hand and he looked as if he'd been holding it for some time; and she was gazing up at him as if—oh, there's no use trying to describe the way she was looking at him. If some little flapper, away back in the ancient times, ever summoned up the nerve to look a real god in the eye and let him hold her hand, she must have looked at him just like that.

And that wasn't all, by any means. The boss himself raised his head and sort of surveyed the neighborhood as if he'd never really seen it before. He was smiling; he doesn't do that so often. There was a kind of pinkish flush on his face, too, and as a rule he's pale. Then the wonderful girl in the car said something to him and he burst out laughing, just like a boy; and he took her hand in both of his and squeezed; and she put out her other hand, and there they were for about a minute, just looking at one another!

And then something woke them up and they were all flustered for ten seconds or so; and after that she started the engine and drove off and Mr. Berford stood on the curb waving his hand after her!

Queer? It was a lot more than queer. You'd have had to know Mr. Berford as well as I did, to realize how queer it all was. I just kept on staring, even after the boss had walked into the building. Jimmy poked my ribs.

"Not so worse, chief—huh?" he said. "Not so worse for a guy like him? They got some slick ones, up to the Follies—huh?"

"Mail those letters!" I said.

There was no Follies about that girl, though; she was just plain millionaire class and she was so infernally pretty that one felt sort of dazed, even after looking at her from a distance and—well, Mr. Berford came into his office just then.

He was whistling a jazzy little tune to himself! I'd never heard him do that before, and as a matter of fact, I haven't heard him do it many times since—but he was whistling then, fast enough. Also, he'd brought the smile all the way upstairs with him.

"Good morning, Henry!" he said.

"Good morning, sir!" I said.

"Wonderful day!" he went on.

"Yes, sir."

"*Wonderful* day!" said the boss, and actually grinned at me; and then, instead of handing me his hat to hang up on the clothes tree in the corner, he sent it spinning through the air—and I'm blest if it didn't land squarely on the peg at that!

"Mail all ready for me, Henry?" he said, as he sat down behind his desk.

"Right there, sir!"

He picked up the first letter of the pile I'd sorted out for his personal attention and put in about two minutes staring at it, holding it upside down. Then he dropped it and looked at me.

"Henry!" he said. "You're pretty efficient, aren't you?"

"I hope so," I answered.

"How long have you been my secretary?"

"A little over three years now."

"How old are you?" said the boss.

"Twenty-five," I said, and began to wonder what it was about.

Mr. Berford just shook his head thoughtfully.

"Um-m?" he muttered. "Doesn't seem any nine years since I was twenty-five myself!—Er, Henry!"

"Yes, sir."

"How many times have I raised your salary?"

"Well, just once, two years ago," I said.

"Really?" said Mr. Berford, and he looked almost shocked. "Well, I'm going to raise it again: ten per, Henry, beginning immediately. You do not find yourself heartbroken over this?"

I suppose I grinned. If I did, most of it was astonishment; the president of our corporation doesn't put that easy, intimate effect into his conversation as a rule.

"Sir, I can stand a shock like that four times a week, if necessary!" I answered—and it struck me all of a sudden that that wasn't just the way I'd been in the habit of talking to Mr. Berford, either!

He only leaned back and laughed, though—yes, laughed right out loud, like an ordinary human being!—and when he had finished laughing his face smoothed out into the funniest, most glorified smile and he clasped his hands on top of his desk and looked straight at me.

"Henry!" he burst out. "Did you—er—ever—er—"

And that was all there was of that! The boss straightened up in his chair with quite a jerk and coughed; the glorified smile disappeared and he frowned over his mail, just as he always does, and coughed again, quite violently.

"Er—what was I going to say?—Well, it's immaterial, in any case," he murmured, and kept his eye on the mail. "I'll—er—ring for you when I've been through this stuff, Henry. We'll go light on the mail to-day; I want to finish up that report for the annual meeting of the directors this afternoon."

Then he glanced at me again, in the dear old familiar way, which means "get out of here!" I trotted into my own little two-by-four office, and I can't say that, all alone

there, I broke down and wept. I have no responsibilities, of course, but an extra ten-spot every Saturday looks just as pretty and enticing to me as it does to the next man; thinking it all over, I certainly did warm through to that girl in the big blue roadster!

We'll admit that I'm not particularly bright; still, there are some things that can be grasped without entirely wrecking the brain, and this was one of them: at last, Mr. Thomas F. Berford was in love!

This happens, so I understand, to a number of people in the course of a year, but there was something mighty near incredible about Mr. Berford getting into that condition. Maybe it was because he had always seemed so hard and arrogant, without a grain of sentiment in him; maybe it was because, in my own mind, I'd never associated him with one thing in the wide world but Work, with a capital W.

And he was a glutton for work! Normally, he'd arrive in the morning with that rushing effect that always suggested a Kansas cyclone, slap down the black brief case he always carries; ring for me if I hadn't already appeared, dump the brief case on his desk and begin dictating, even before getting at the mail. After that, he'd play a symphony on his little bank of electric buttons and department heads would come a-running and then stand and listen, all screwed up to concert pitch, while Mr. Berford shot orders at them with the general effect of a machine-gun.

Next, we'd do the early mail Marathon, and when that was over I had ruined another notebook and had six more pencils ready for the sharpener. After that came the visitors, all by appointment, and it was a mighty important one who talked more than five minutes in the president's office—and so on through the day, at just the same speed, until some time after five Mr. Berford would pack up his black brief case again until it bulged and then steer for the old home up-town. They said he worked all night every night, and I've been inclined more than once to believe it.

Oh, he was a hustler, fast enough, and there seemed to be no end to his energy. I've seen young Mallison, the boob junior partner—the firm used to be Berford &

Mallison, you know, before we incorporated—I've seen Mallison come in with his golf sticks and pat Mr. Berford on the back and beg him to come take just one week off. Why, Mallison used to do everything but cry over him! When Mr. Berford would shake his head and tell him to get out, as he always did, Mallison used to look like a mother worried to death over her sick only child. And I've seen other friends come in and implore him to go with them for trips and cruises and so on. He never went; when Mr. Berford left New York, it was on business. And once, I remember, somebody had his old family doctor call at the office and do his darnedest to make Mr. Berford promise to quit an hour earlier and come uptown and have himself thumped and sounded all over, to see what part of him was getting ready to smash first under the strain; he never went there, either. It's just possible that Mr. Berford himself knew best how he felt, but even so it did seem queer how he kept it up.

He rang for me about half past ten and we finished up the annual report; and it was certainly *some* report! I knew we had been doing a mighty fine business through the year, but I hadn't suspected that we were turning into a monopoly. Four minor competitors had just been sponged out of the picture completely; three more, bigger ones, we had absorbed gently and painlessly, and they were now part of the Berford corporation. That, of course, left a single big firm for us to buck, the Storm Manufacturing Company--otherwise George R. Storm, the champion hard-boiled, iron-fisted, relentless business man of all time! We'd been bucking them and they, incidentally, had been bucking us for several years; and I suppose it is no breach of confidence to say that they'd put at least as many dents into us as ever we'd put into them. Off and on, there had been a lot of talk among our big people about coming to some amicable agreement with the Storm folks, but it never seemed to get anywhere.

Well, that's the sort of report it was and I really enjoyed writing it; and I was glad, too, that I'd be sitting beside Mr. Berford when he read it, so that I could watch the directors' faces.

They're a lot of funny old birds, our directors. We're a very staid old concern, you know, and this crowd was all associated with the original Berford, Thomas F.'s father. Jones and Moreland are just ordinary old-timers; Macpherson is about what his name indicates; Bennett's the best old soul that ever lived, all kindness and sympathy; but Isaac Craven is the greatest card of the whole collection. Somebody must have done something pretty mean to Craven when he was an impressionable little child and the memory has stuck fast ever since. When Craven puts down his head and looks at you through his thick eyebrows, you know perfectly well that he suspects you of looting the safe; after thirty seconds of it you begin to wonder yourself if you haven't been doing something like that. I think Craven must have trusted his own father and mother implicitly—if they were covered by a thoroughly responsible bonding company.

All five of them gathered at four o'clock.

They puffed into the directors' room and shed their coats and got out their expensive cigars; they swapped a few anecdotes about the Civil War and Jim Fiske and Black Friday and other things you read about in histories; and then Mr. Berford and I came in and the session began.

I wasn't disappointed in that matter of watching their faces while the president read his notes; they looked like a lot of nice elderly children hearing the news that all candy is to be distributed free henceforth and that there'll be an extra Santa Claus working next Christmas. Four of them sat and gurgled; Craven just nodded and nodded and rubbed his hands together until one would have thought the skin must have peeled. And the boss finished his declamation and they clapped their hands and rose and patted him on the shoulders; they did everything but cheer.

Bennett was the most enthusiastic of them all.

They calmed after a while and sat down again, all but Bennett; he remained standing by his chair and his smile seemed to light up the whole place.

"Ah—gentlemen—you, Tom—all hands! This is—ah—splendid!" he said.

"Splendid's not the word for it—not the word for it!" Jones said.

"Well, magnificent might be a little better, Joe," Mr. Bennett beamed. "However, we won't waste time hunting adjectives; I think we all feel more adjectives just now than can be expressed. But it seems to me a fitting moment to express our appreciation of Thomas Berford, just once more and just a little more strongly than usual; and with your permission, gentlemen, I shall try to do that!"

They applauded; Mr. Bennett bowed and cleared his throat.

"Thomas," he went on solemnly, to Mr. Berford, "we knew you, most of us, as a boy—the worthy son of your incomparable father. We felt, all of us, no slightest trace of hesitation in asking you, five years ago and young as you were, to take the place he once occupied in our company. Yet not one of us, I am very certain, felt that another man *quite* like your father could exist—and there is not one of us to-day, Thomas, unconscious of some slight amazement that another such man not only can and does exist, but that we have the rare good fortune to own him as our chief executive!"

They applauded some more and this time Mr. Berford bowed and smiled.

"I am a man of few words, Thomas," the speaker continued, "and to those few I cannot give sufficient strength. We have known you for many years as a man whose spotless private life was far, far beyond the faintest breath of criticism—whose energy in our service has been so tireless, whose executive capacity has been so broad, as to be almost astounding. No, no, my dear boy! Don't protest! This is not flattery, but simple, happy truth. And to-day, after hearing your report and realizing all that lies behind it, I want to go just a little bit farther. I want to tell you, Thomas, that it is my firm conviction, as it is the sense of all this gathering, that in you we possess the perfect man, the perfect president!"

And again they clapped their hands, even to Craven, who actually smiled as he did it; Mr. Berford shrugged his shoulders and looked a little bored and foolish.

"Thanks, but it isn't necessary to lay it on as thick as all that!" he said.

"I think it is, Tom," Macpherson said unexpectedly. "There's none other just like you in the whole world; there's never been but one—your father."

"And when he names you 'perfect,' Tom, he says no more than we all feel!" Mr. Moreland contributed very earnestly.

"And now, having said very badly what I wished to say so emphatically," Mr. Bennett concluded, with the same beaming smile, "may I make a single prophecy? Within one year, gentlemen, *within one year* I venture to predict, Thomas Berford will have the Storm Manufacturing Company itself eating out of his capable hand!"

He sat down and they stared hard at him because that, surely, was putting things pretty strongly. Jones gave one or two dubious nods, as if he'd have liked to be optimistic about it, but found that impossible. Macpherson just sighed; Craven pulled down one corner of his mouth with the familiar, sneering effect that passed for a smile. But Mr. Bennett leaned forward, pounding the table with his clenched fist, and glared at them.

"Why dammit! He's *capable* of it! He'll *do* it, sooner or later! I'll bet any man present a thousand dollars that Tom has from one to a dozen tentative schemes in his head at this minute for bringing Storm into camp! Well?"

They didn't take the bet—and just then I happened to look at Mr. Berford, and I kept on looking, harder and harder, for that smile of his was distinctly peculiar. It began as the faintest little flush; it grew broader and broader; then it seemed to sink into him again, and he chuckled for a second or two.

He looked around the table and rubbed his chin meditatively, as he does when his mind isn't quite made up. After that he gave a small grunt and rose to his feet. And, standing there and looking at them, he made quite a picture. More than anything else, it seemed as if Mr. Berford was hypnotizing them. He was just oozing domination over those five old gentlemen, as he did about every so often when something important was afoot; and they were looking

up at him in the same inquiring, expectant way I had come to recognize.

"Well, gentlemen," Mr. Berford said, in that crisp voice of his, "now that you've said all these nice things about me, may I be permitted to thank you?"

"It's not necessary, Tom," Bennett said.

"And, having thanked you, to make a little speech of my own!" the president smiled. "What I have to say is of a distinctly personal nature and perhaps this is not quite the place to say it. But on the other hand," he went on soberly, "perhaps it is a confidence which is due you gentlemen. I recognize to the full the close relation between a man's personal life and his business life; to you gentlemen, the directors of our company, I have always tried to make my life an open book—and hence, perhaps more than you quite understand, I appreciate very deeply the trust in me that you have been so kind as to express."

He drew a long breath and looked rather uncomfortable and sheepish. They stared at him with growing curiosity.

"All of this, gentlemen, is leading up to the announcement that your bachelor president, shortly, will no longer be a bachelor president."

"Huh?" said Craven.

"I expect to be married in June."

"Married?" gasped Mr. Bennett.

"Married!" smiled the president.

"Well—by cracky!" the old boy yelled, joyfully. "Going to turn human like the rest of us, are you? Going to get out of the hermit state and join the jolly old race, eh? Well, that's *fine*, Tom! That—that—that—by gad! that's tremendous!"

Now all of them were gabbling about it, too! They popped out of their chairs and swarmed around the president, shaking his hand and congratulating him; even Craven joined in this, although without much enthusiasm. Mr. Berford waited patiently until they had quieted down; then Moreland asked:

"Who's the fortunate lady, Tom?"

"Well, that's the second part of my announcement," the president said, with a broad smile. "The lady who has done me the very great honor of consenting to be my wife is—ah—Miss Alicia Storm!"

Just exactly as if five strings had pulled them, all five sat bolt upright and gaped at him.

"Not—not George Storm's daughter?" Jones cried.

"His only daughter," Mr. Berford said quietly.

Moreland got up to the surface about that time with a new gasp:

"You're going to—to *marry the Storm Manufacturing Company?*"

"I am going to marry Mr. Storm's daughter," the boss repeated, rather frostily.

"Well—well—well—here! Here! God bless my soul, what did I tell you? What did I say, not five minutes ago?" Mr. Bennett sputtered, quite crazily. "Didn't I predict that—um—that—" And just there he caught Mr. Berford's eye which was quite cold and steely, and he subsided suddenly with a mumbled: "Not—not to imply, Tom, that—ah—not to imply, of course, that—er—well, you know what I mean, my dear boy!"

There was a heavy hush, second after second, as they assimilated the news. Mr. Jones broke it, in a queer, awed little voice:

"We called him—called him perfect," and he looked around dizzily. "Isn't there any stronger word than that? Isn't there any stronger word than just perfect?"

CHAPTER II.

REGARDING LUCK.

I DON'T know. The longer you live in this world, the more of a shame it seems that nothing under the sun can ever be quite one hundred per cent perfect. What I mean is that, if you ever did happen to stumble on a mine with a billion dollars' worth of pure gold in the middle of a desert, some infernal crape-hanger would be sure to pop up from nowhere at all and tell you that probably it wasn't pure gold—and if it was, gold was going down so fast that it wasn't worth anything like a billion dollars—and even if it stopped going down, it would probably cost more to mine it in this particular location than the gold was worth.

It was just like that in this matter of Mr. Berford's announcing his engagement.

Four of the five directors broke loose after a minute or so and raised shouts of rejoicing; and Mr. Berford grew paler and paler and I knew, if nobody else did, that he was getting madder than sixty, his announcement not having been taken in quite the way he had intended—or rather, perhaps, having been taken in such a purely selfish way by the directorate that the president wasn't feeling flattered.

The director who did not lift up his voice in jubilation was Mr. Isaac Craven.

He had started at the very first mention of the Storm name; his mean eyes had taken on a meaner little squint and fastened hard on Mr. Berford, and they had been there ever since. Now, as a sort of happy giggle died down Craven's lips opened slowly.

"That—hey?" he said.

"What?" Mr. Berford asked.

Craven nodded, just once, as if he understood a great deal.

"It seems possible that your life may not have been quite the open book you have led us to believe!" he said, very distinctly, while the rest of them sat rather stunned.

"What the devil do you mean by that, sir?" Mr. Berford asked, and banged his fist down on the table.

"I mean that you've been secretly consorting with the family of George Storm, sir!" Craven cried, and banged down his own fist! "I mean, sir, that in actual fact you are upon the friendliest terms with a— an individual fondly supposed by us to be your—as he is our—deadliest enemy, personal and business! I mean to say, sir, that this smells amazingly strong of treason to our company and—"

"Why, you confounded old fool!" Mr. Bennett shouted, and he has a big voice when he wants to use it. "You soured, doddering old—old idiot! You—pay no attention to him, Thomas! Pay no attention and—"

He said more, but it was drowned out by the uproar that was coming from Jones and Moreland and Macpherson about that time! They, too, were addressing Craven—and after about thirty seconds of the din they seemed to be making an impression; old Isaac looked downright scared.

Both Mr. Berford's fists were clenched and he was snow-white and his jaw stuck out as he waited. It was quite interesting! He waited until things were quiet and Craven had shut his old teeth tight together and pulled down the corners of his mouth.

"May I say," the president began, so steadily that I knew he was having a dickens of a time to control himself, "that of all things in the world, the possibility of having such construction placed upon my engagement to Miss Storm never occurred to me?"

"Of course it never occurred to you!" Mr. Bennett thundered at Craven. "Why the Sam Hill should it occur to you? Why—"

"Just a minute, please! But since it has occurred to Mr. Craven and since he has voiced it with such charming candor, at whatever personal humiliation I insist upon explaining the matter as well as may be. I—"

"No explanation is necessary!" Moreland cried.

"Yes it is—and Craven's going to get it!" said the boss, and his voice shook. "I met Miss Storm for the first time just five months ago. I have talked with her father, in his home, just four times. He is at least as frank as—and rather more happily poised than—Mr. Craven. In the plainest English, at the first interview, he laid down the proposition—and I accepted it—that out of business hours our personal relation had best be something like that which obtains between lawyers who fight tooth and nail on opposite sides of a case and afterward go to dinner together!"

"Naturally! Naturally!" Mr. Bennett puffed. "Storm's a devil incarnate, but he's not an ass."

"He's not even a devil, when you get acquainted with him, sir," said the president, with a faint little smile. "Last night—specifically at half-past nine, in her own home," he spat at Craven, "I became engaged to Miss Storm. About one hour later I talked for a considerable time with her father. He is, as are we, tired of fighting; he is not only open to—*say, I'll be damned if I'll go any farther with this explanation!*"

shouted Mr. Berford, as he lost himself for a second or two.

"Well, by the mighty! I guess you *needn't* go any farther!" Moreland cried, and his voice cracked with the pure joy of the thing. "You've said enough! You—you're a wonder! You're—"

They were at it again, all of them chattering at once like so many monkeys, first at one another and then, all of them, at Mr. Craven. And I'm bound to say that Craven was funny to watch. He seemed to be shrinking down; his eyes were wide open again and he was waving his hands, palms upward, and saying something or other that nobody bothered to hear. Mr. Berford held up one hand and they grew silent suddenly.

"Does that explanation suffice?" he demanded.

"*You bet* it suffices!" Mr. Jones cackled, and the rest nodded energetically.

"And has the book of my life been opened to *your* satisfaction, Mr. Craven?"

Four old gentlemen leaned toward Craven at once. For a moment I thought there was going to be a sort of elderly battle royal, to get at him; but old Isaac pulled himself out of his chair and came toward Berford.

"I ask your pardon, Thomas," he said, nicely enough. "I spoke hastily and without due thought. I offer you my most humble apology."

He held out his hand and, of course, Mr. Berford shook it, although I didn't notice that Craven had to wince any at the grip he got. As he turned around and went back to his chair, I caught his expression and it struck me harder than ever how much more like a catty old lady he is than like a man. Woman convinced against her will, you know—all that sort of thing.

Anyhow, peace was restored and everything was lovely, and nothing short of a national calamity could have taken the smiles off the faces of those old gentlemen for a while. They talked and they guarded their words so as not to offend Mr. Berford; but a blind and deaf man in that room could have sensed that nobody contemplated suicide because the president was going to marry the Storm Manufacturing Company.

So far as that goes, it did mean a lot to all present. It meant getting decent prices henceforth and less worry and hundreds on hundreds of thousands of dollars saved on advertising campaigns; by the time the consolidation really had been effected, it would mean running two huge firms for about the price of one, with the profits nearly doubled for everybody. These old codgers owned about all the Berford stock that had ever been sold; no wonder they were pleased!

But the president's ruffled fur wasn't smoothing down so easily. Mr. Berford is an extremely proud person, and it had hurt him like sixty to stand up there and explain his private affairs to old Craven. He fussed for a minute or two, glaring at them; then he turned and glared at me, as if he were going to knock me senseless just to relieve his feelings. Then he got up with a savage little jerk and they all stopped talking and stared at him.

"I am merely going over there for a drink of water!" he explained tartly.

And he marched away from the table and his heels must have ground straight through the four thousand dollars' worth of lovely Oriental rug we have in that directors' room!

They put up our building in the funny old era when no office was properly furnished unless it had a marble basin stuck in the corner. The marble basin was in here, with a mirror hung up above it and an ancient screen in front of it; and they had put the showy white water-cooler behind the screen, too, in the interest of artistic harmony, I suppose, the rest of the place being rather chastely elaborate.

That was where Mr. Berford headed and, once behind the screen, he took his own time about reappearing. I don't know just what was going on back there, but I can imagine most of it; and very likely if the directorate could have heard exactly what their president was muttering, they'd have made a break for the door. He drank one glass of water and then another glass; I heard the tumbler clink back into its place on the stand and there was a little wait. Another thirty seconds and Mr. Berford probably felt that he could face them again

without committing mayhem, for he started back toward his place at the table.

The screens in our offices are so arranged that it is practically impossible to get out from behind one of them without knocking it flat to the floor. This one was set at just the regulation angle; and the president hit it with his shoulder and it began to tilt; and he snarled quite viciously at the screen and yanked it back with a good deal more force than seemed necessary. He gave it such a violent yank, in fact, that he himself bumped squarely into the wall close by.

He snarled again as his other shoulder hit something. Two or three seconds I watched him pawing at the mirror, which had been dislodged, and trying to catch it and then the thing escaped his fingers altogether and went down on the floor with a crash that sounded as if half the plate glass in the building had caved in! Down at Mr. Berford's feet there were, at a rough guess, about five hundred little pieces of broken mirror!

Some of my ancestors must have been ignorant and superstitious people; it's all nonsense, of course, but to save my soul I can't see a thing like that happen without having a little cold chill, even if it is only for an instant. Mr. Berford had some other kind of ancestors, I imagine. He just looked at the wreckage and growled and kicked most of it back behind the screen, thereafter resuming his trip toward the table. Within a yard of it, he stopped short and stared blank astonishment.

Upon my word of honor, to the very last one of them, those five old gentlemen, all nearing seventy, all substantial, hard-headed business men, were sitting there with their mouths open and their eyes fairly popping!

"That's—unfortunate! That's very unfortunate!" Macpherson breathed.

Jones tittered, more than anything else like a scared little boy.

"Seven years bad luck!" he said.

"Seven *what*?" Mr. Berford rasped.

"That's what they say, Thomas!"

"Absurd—yes," Mr. Moreland put in. "But my younger brother, many years ago, broke his mirror and—"

"And had seven years bad luck?" Berford laughed.

"He wasn't spared to suffer them, Tom. He met a woman that very night who drove him to drink within the year and to the grave within another!" Moreland said, and shook his head.

Something about this and the sigh that went with it helped restore Craven's balance at least; he pulled down the corner of his mouth, sneered undisguisedly at Mr. Moreland and seemed to feel better. Mr. Berford's teeth came together with an angry click and he was about to speak when Bennett interrupted with:

"Ridiculous, of course. Yes, yes, we're bound to admit it's ridiculous. But I do call to mind one little incident in this connection which made a lasting impression on me. It must have been about 1888—yes, it was in the early spring of 1888, just after the big blizzard, that a cousin of mine—a young chap, you understand, without a grain of superstition in his whole makeup, chanced to—er—were you waiting to say something, Thomas?"

"If you don't object?"

"Not a particle. Go on."

"Then may I ask of you gentlemen in so many words," the president rapped out, "if there is really one among you who seriously believes that bad luck follows the breaking of a mirror?"

They stirred uneasily, but nobody spoke until:

"Well, there's a lot of things in this life, Thomas, that we may not *believe*, in the ordinary sense of the word," Macpherson began, heavily and unsmilingly. "And at the same time the evidence may be so overwhelming that there *is* something that—that—well, perhaps there's not, after all. Perhaps there's not."

"Most emphatically, there is *not*!" Mr. Berford snapped contemptuously. "And there is no such thing as 'bad luck' or 'good luck' or any other kind of 'luck'! What comes to a man in the way of 'bad luck' he brings upon himself, absolutely without any exception whatsoever!"

"Always, Tom?" Macpherson sighed dubiously.

"Invariably!" barked the president, and

he made a pretty convincing figure as he stood there, too, and it was funny to watch the sheepish grin that went around that table and the way they avoided looking directly at him. He had shamed them! He'd done just that!

Mr. Bennett coughed.

"Tom's right, of course. He's always right," said he. "Good luck's what a man works like the devil to get and finally does get—and bad luck's the fitting reward for the scamp! Quite right—quite right."

"And even so, Bennett," Macpherson insisted, "it does happen—"

"No, it doesn't, Mr. Macpherson," the president laughed as he sat down. "A man's bad luck is the punishment he's earned for bad acts. A man who's right—clean *right* all the way through!—doesn't have any bad luck! Now, is there any further business to be looked after before we adjourn?"

Craven cackled out a sour little laugh.

"Only to pass a resolution of thanks to you for being the sanest man present, I guess, Thomas," he said.

And it was just exactly at that moment that it began to happen!

I always sat beside Mr. Berford at meetings, taking down whatever had to be taken down, trotting out now and then for documents and all that sort of thing, and my chair faced the door of the directors' room. Well, the excitement having all subsided and there being nothing of a stenographic nature to record, I was just sitting and looking at the door—when it opened about four inches and Jimmy's face appeared.

That kid never had any idea of the solemnity or importance of any occasion; he would have walked straight in if I hadn't caught his eye at just the right second. As it was, he stopped and beckoned to me; and I shook my head "no" and Jimmy shook his head "yes" and beckoned again. I waved a hand, trying to tell him to close the door; he merely stood there and went on beckoning; so that finally I laid my book and pencil on the table and went over on tiptoe—and pushed him out and followed him and closed the door behind me.

"Well, what's the matter with you?" I asked.

The blamed little clown put the tip of his forefinger under his chin and curtsied!

"Oh, Morsey! I hate t' tell ya!" he said.

"What?"

"Say, lissen!" said the boy. "As a rule, this place ain't what you could call interesting, but to-day things is different. This is our day for cuties, Morse! First the chicken in the gas-wagon—and now this bimbo!"

"What bimbo?"

"Oh, Morsey—*wonderful*! Shall I tell you about her or would you like to give her the up-and-down first and hear about her afterward? She's right out there in the hall by your office door."

"A woman?"

"A dream!" said James. "She wants to see the main squeeze and she says her business is personal. What it must be to be rich like Berford, Morsey, and have 'em buzz you like this—huh? What it must be—"

Well, I left him just then and made for the corridor—and she was there, all right enough!

She couldn't have been much over twenty and she was pretty. Phew! but she *was* pretty, too! Not like the Storm girl, you understand; that girl was just pure class; but she was a mighty attractive young person, all the same. She had huge blue eyes, rather darker than they are usually; she had a funny, straight little nose that looked as if she'd be likely to finish anything she started; and she had a chin with a big dimple in the middle. When it came to clothes, she was not so striking. That is, she was very nicely dressed, but—oh, sort of plain and severe, I suppose you'd call it. There was a fur thing around her neck and there were little shiny buckles on her pumps. The whole effect of her at first was quiet respectability; but when you looked hard at her—and it was part of my job to look hard at people and save time by guessing what they wanted before they explained, there was something about this girl not quite as soft and refined as it might have been. I don't know what it was; maybe it wasn't there at all.

Meanwhile, she was looking me over just

about as carefully, and she smiled suddenly and showed some magnificent teeth as she said:

"Is Mr. Berford coming?"

"Well, no, I'm afraid he's not," I said. "Mr. Berford is in conference and can't be disturbed. Have you an appointment with him?"

"An appointment?" the girl repeated, and opened those magnificent eyes. "Why, no, of course not."

"Then if you'll give me your name and address and the nature of your business, miss, I'll take it up with Mr. Berford and let you know when—and if—he can see you."

And I pulled out the pencil and the little notebook with the regular flourish and prepared to write—and all the girl did was to stare at me as if she didn't understand at all.

"I wish to see Mr. Berford *now!*" she explained.

"But, as I said, he's in conference and—"

"Well, that doesn't make a bit of difference," she informed me. "I wish to see him now!"

Her nice little nose dilated; she seemed to be growing quite fretful. I produced the reliable old smile, which usually eases them out of the office like so much grease. It didn't work with her. She stamped her foot.

"In fact, I insist upon seeing him now," she added. "Go, at once, and say that I insist!"

Once in a while, you know, they stick like that; or they stick until Mr. Berford comes out with fire in his eye, and they don't stick very long afterward. It dawned on me suddenly that this girl was a Grade A sticker and that I might talk myself hoarse without budging her!

"If you'll give me your name and your business—" I began!

"I shall *not* give you my name!"

"But—"

"And I shall most certainly *not* tell you the nature of my business! Now tell Mr. Berford that I wish to see him!"

I left her there. I found the president with the directors all back in the state of

pure admiration, telling him that not one of them believed broken mirrors had any real consequences and sort of thanking him for dispelling any little shakiness they may have had on the subject for a minute or two. He glanced up at me with a dry smile and I told him about the girl.

"Name?" he said.

"She wouldn't give it."

"What does she want?"

"She wouldn't tell me that, either."

"Can't see her!" said the president and turned back to the table.

"Well, excuse me, Mr. Berford," I said, "but this young lady looks determined and I don't think she's selling anything. I think she has some personal matter that she wants to talk about and she—er—she insists on seeing you."

"You're a pretty good judge of people, Henry," smiled Mr. Berford. "Find out what she's after if you can. If it seems necessary make an appointment for three o'clock to-morrow. That hour's open?"

"You see the railroad people at three fifteen," I reminded him.

The boss grinned! The overwhelming good humor was back upon him.

"I can get rid of any woman in the world in five minutes, Henry," he said. "Make it for three."

So I went back to the girl and she glanced behind me to see if the president was following, and when he wasn't her nostrils dilated again.

"Where will he see me?" she demanded.

"In his office," I said, just as smoothly as possible, "tomorrow afternoon at three o'clock. And please be on time, because at three fifteen—"

"To-morrow?" she echoed very sharply. "But I don't want to see him to-morrow; I want to see him to-day—"

"But if you will call to-morrow—"

She drew back her pretty head and looked me in the eye.

"I am calling *now!*" she said. "Go back to Mr. Berford and tell him that!"

"But—"

That is as far as I was permitted to go. Her blue eyes were snapping now, and if a girl as pretty as all that can look dangerous, that is what she was doing!

"And it might be just as well for you to add," she broke in, "that unless he finds it convenient to grant me an interview, I shall make a scene here!"

CHAPTER III.

OUT OF THE PAST.

I COULDN'T believe my ears.

"A what?" I said.

"A scene!"

"What sort of a scene?"

There was an awful sweetness in the smile she gave me then.

"If you will just bring back another refusal from Mr. Berford," she said, "you will know! Now, go!"

So I went. It may seem queer that I didn't stay there and argue the matter out with her—smooth her down diplomatically, of course, as I've done first and last with at least a dozen cranks and maniacs of different kinds. But there was something about the assured air of that girl. She looked as if she had authority to talk and act like that.

Mr. Berford glanced up casually when I reached his side.

"You look quite flustered, Henry," he observed. "Did you have to arrange the appointment?"

"I did not, sir," I said. "You see, this young woman—"

That's all I ever had to explain about that young woman; the rest she explained herself. In a word, even then, she was with us!

I don't know how she got there. It is quite a puzzle for strangers to find the directors' room alone, because one has to go up and down several corridors. Perhaps she had been quietly tagging along behind me; at all events, she had pushed open the door and was two yards inside it before any of us noticed her.

Mr. Bennett looked startled and began to puff his way out of his chair—and observed that none of the rest of them were doing it and sank back again. The president shot one annoyed, uninterested glance toward her and spoke very softly to me:

"This the young lady, Henry?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Charity worker after a subscription; I can tell 'em a mile away," said Mr. Berford. "Get her out of here!"

I never moved. Somehow, I couldn't move, for watching that curious approach of hers; and I doubt very much if Mr. Berford ever noted the disobedience. Just then, you see, his interest in the girl was beginning to quicken, because she was heading straight for him and she was winking quite rapidly, almost as if she meant to cry! And more than this her lips were quivering so pathetically that I started and stared a little harder at her—and now I'm blest if she didn't stretch out her hands appealingly toward the boss and cry softly:

"Tom!"

"Huh?" said the president.

"Oh, Tom!" the girl breathed.

For fifteen seconds at least, nobody moved a muscle—except the muscles that control the eyes. As one man, the directors looked at the girl and then looked at Mr. Berford; and Mr. Berford frowned wonderingly. And with the saddest little gesture, just as if her heart had broken, the girl dropped her hands.

"Aren't you even going to—to say 'hello' to me, Tom?" she asked, so faintly that we could no more than catch the words.

I don't quite know what would have happened to an ordinary man; if I had been in his shoes, I know I'd have felt guilty and panic-stricken and all that sort of thing; but Thomas Berford is a hard man to jar. So, the first shock having passed almost immediately, he merely rose and smiled patiently.

"I should be most pleased to say 'hello,' if I happened to know you, miss," he said quietly. "But that pleasure is not mine and—"

"Tom!" the girl cried.

"Hah!" said Isaac Craven.

"And, the pleasure having been denied me," the president went on, more sharply, "may I point out that this is a directors' meeting, young woman, and—"

"But—but you're Tom Berford!" the visitor gasped, blankly.

"That is my name!" the boss said, and

his voice rose. "But, I assure you, you have confused me with some other Berford."

"But I—I *haven't!*" the girl stammered. "There isn't any other—I mean, you *are* Tom Berford and—and who should know you know better than I know you?"

And having fired this one, she turned and gazed at the five old gentlemen; and, honestly, it was astounding, that expression of hers! She looked utterly dazed and stricken and alone, like somebody who has just landed in a strange country and found that the friends she expected to meet her are all dead, if you get what I mean. She looked so forsaken, so pretty, that before her eyes had rested on Mr. Bennett for two seconds he was muttering:

"Well—well, upon my word! Why, my poor child, I—that is to say—"

"Please don't say anything, Mr. Bennett," the president said very crisply. "The young lady has made an astonishing mistake, of course. I was unaware that I owned a double, either in name or appearance; but such is apparently the case. It's most unusual, of course, but—"

Everybody in our little Berford Corporation world had a habit of hanging on Mr. Berford's words and listening most attentively to all he had to say. This girl did not belong to our world; it seemed to be against her principles to let Mr. Berford finish even one sentence! As in this case. Abruptly, she switched her attention from the directorate and turned it upon the president; her big eyes opened in astonishment; she took a step nearer Mr. Berford and searched his face—which, by the way, was getting a little redder.

"Tom, you're not telling them that you—you don't even know me?" she choked. "You—oh, you *couldn't* do that!"

"I am telling not only them, I am telling *you* that—as you yourself know perfectly well—I never laid eyes upon you before, madam!" the president cried.

"But—but—"

"And whatever all this may be, whether it is an astounding error on your part or—or whatever else, we have had more than enough of it!" Mr. Berford concluded. "I ask you to retire!"

Did she retire from the scene? Yes, she retired just about as much as the directors' table or the west wall of the room retired! She stood absolutely motionless for a little space, looking and looking at Mr. Berford, whose temper was decidedly up—just looking and not giving one small hang for his temper! What that little thing's eyes were saying, I actually hated to think; but they were saying it and the directorate, not to mention Mr. Berford himself, were listening.

"Tom," she whispered. "You—you're not ashamed of me, are you?"

And then she wept! Aye, she began to sniff and her pretty lips began to tremble and she pulled out a little joke of a handkerchief and tried to hide behind it, her shoulders shaking. And, to say the least, the response was prompt! Mr. Berford stood like a statue, staring at her incredulously and quite pale now, but the old gentlemen all left their chairs at once. Isaac Craven jammed his hands down in his trousers pockets and looked steadily at our president; the other four hurried to the girl.

Mr. Bennett dragged a chair from the table; Jones and Moreland helped in forcing her into it gently. Macpherson patted her shoulder and sighed heavily:

"Well, well, lass! Don't you cry now. These things happen and—"

"*What* things happen?" Mr. Berford roared savagely. "I assure you, Mr. Macpherson, that nothing, of any description whatever, has happened to warrant—"

"Maybe not, Tom," Macpherson said quietly, "but this is no time to let your anger run away with you. You're distressing her!"

He went on patting her shoulder. Mr. Bennett patted her other shoulder. Jones started off to get her a glass of water. Mr. Moreland picked up a newspaper and fanned her—I don't know why and I'm sure he didn't know, either. They were all talking at once, too, and crooning over her as they might have crooned over a child. Queer, how much attention a pretty girl can get with a few tears, isn't it?

"Now, my dear, my dear!" Mr. Bennett was saying. "The mistake is yours,

I assure you—a most remarkable mistake!—but don't cry about it, child!"

"Most—remarkable!" Craven said distinctly.

"What?" snapped the president.

"It might be well to open that book of your life again, Thomas, and let us read another page or two, eh?"

Mr. Berford walked straight to him.

"You are implying that I seek to hide something of a disgraceful nature, in connection with this girl?"

"I am implying nothing at all, Thomas," Craven said, just as steadily and, I'm bound to say, just as dangerously. "We have all heard what the girl said. She knows you and—"

"She does not!"

"Berford, don't be ridiculous. We're not fools!"

The president threw out his hands suddenly.

"Gentlemen!" he cried passionately. "I ask your attention for just one minute. I want to assure you, upon my solemn word of honor, that I never saw this young woman before she entered this room!"

"Well, we know that, Tom," Bennett said soothingly. "You needn't protest like that. The young lady has made a very odd blunder, of course, and that's all and—now, now, my child! Aha! We's not going to cry any more, eh? That's better! Yes, indeed, that's better!"

She looked up at him trustfully and the good old soul beamed down at her.

"You—believe in justice, don't you?" she whispered.

"I should say so!"

"Even for a girl who is all alone and friendless?"

Mr. Bennett blinked at her.

"Ah—certainly! For everyone!" he said.

And the girl kept on looking at him and her little hand fluttered into his.

"I can trust *you*!" she said.

"Most decidedly, you can!" said Mr. Bennett, and pulled up another chair to her side and sat down with considerable determination. "Now, my dear! Let's get right down to the bottom of this affair and clear it up!"

"There's a good idea!" Craven rasped.

"I think so," said Mr. Bennett, and glared at him. "My child! We'll begin at the very beginning. What is your name?"

The girl looked at him, and turned and shot the strangest glance at our president and then dropped her eyes.

"Ask Tom!" she said.

"Eh? Well—well—all right, then! Tom—er—do you happen to know her name?"

"How in—ah—how should I know it?" Mr. Berford said, fiercely.

"That's no answer!" Craven submitted.

"Isn't it? Here's an answer, then: *No*! I do *not* know her name!"

"Tom!" cried the girl.

Mr. Craven gave an evil little smile and shook his head.

"She knows yours pretty well, though, doesn't she?"

"So do ten thousand other people, Mr. Craven."

"True, Berford. But none of the other nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine are here inquiring whether you're ashamed of them! Get on with the examination, Bennett!"

"I'm trying to do that! Well—ah—let me see. You're—ah—quite sure that this Mr. Berford is the Mr. Berford you have in mind?"

The girl fairly whirled on him.

Her eyes were big and round and outraged; her bosom heaved; taken all in all she was so startling at that moment that Mr. Bennett sat up and puffed.

"Sure?" she cried. "*Sure?* Do you suppose that any normal woman ever forgets—"

She stopped there. You could have heard the smallest pin in the world drop just then. The first sound was her little gulp, as she covered her eyes again.

Craven was leaning right across the table.

"Yes?" he said. "Yes? Forgets what?"

The girl only sobbed.

"Yes, my dear?" Mr. Bennett said, encouragingly. "What is it that—er—a normal woman never forgets?"

"You—ask Tom!" said the girl.

"Well—ah—"

"Don't ask me!" the president snapped. "I'm not a woman, normal or otherwise. I have no idea what they never forget and I don't give a—er—hang!"

Mr. Bennett frowned in some distress. He is all just simple, conventional goodness, the sort that does the same thing at the same time every day for a hundred years if it happens to live as long as that, and this matter was getting beyond him. Probably, in all his life, he had never encountered anything quite so odd.

"This is—is very confusing, all of it," he muttered. "Won't you please speak up, young woman? I mean to say, won't you be quite frank?"

"What am I concealing?" the girl demanded, indignantly.

"That's just what we're trying to find out and—no, no, not concealing, my child," Bennett said hastily. "But there is—er—something here of which you seem reluctant to speak and—"

"Why shouldn't I be reluctant, when Tom denies even knowing me?"

"Er—just so, of course. Let's put it in another way. Do we understand that you are making—making certain definite charges against Mr. Berford?"

The girl seemed puzzled and shook her head sadly.

"Charges? No—not charges!" she murmured.

"But you're accusing him of something?"

"I—yes!"

"Well, all right, then!" Mr. Bennett said desperately. "*What is it?*"

A long, shuddering sigh came from the girl. Her eyes flashed at Mr. Berford for an instant and then dropped again.

"Ask Tom!" she whispered.

Mr. Bennett got out his handkerchief and dabbed his forehead, although it was not particularly warm in there. Craven snorted and stepped around to their side.

"You're not moving very far or very fast, Bennett," he said sharply. "Let me take charge of this, please."

"Well, but—"

The vinegar member of our board waved him aside and transfixed the girl with his hard old eye.

"My dear lady," he began, "the display of a little candor on your part will be to your interest. Pray be so good as to answer me directly and fully. You know Mr. Berford?"

"Know him!" the girl echoed bitterly.

"Where and when did you first meet him?"

The girl glanced up.

"Ask Tom!" she said.

"I'm asking you! Will you tell me?"

"Let Tom tell you."

Moreland snickered. Mr. Craven's eyes grew a little harder.

"In one way, I understand, I think," he said. "Young woman, I tender you the sacred pledge of every member of this board that whatever you may feel justified in telling us will never be repeated. Also, I beg to point out that you have involved the president of this company in a mysterious way, which needs explanation, not for your sake alone or for his, but for the sake of a large corporation which has ever prided itself upon the spotless integrity of its officers. In common fairness to all concerned, we must have the truth—and the whole truth, down to the very last detail!"

He waited a moment for this to sink in.

"Now!" he said. "Just what relation existed—still exists, perhaps—between you and Mr. Berford?"

The girl only gave another of these shuddering sighs and failed to face him.

"Ask Tom!" she murmured.

Isaac Craven gritted his teeth and then bared them threateningly.

"You are serving yourself very poorly by taking this attitude," he said. "It seems clear that Mr. Berford is bent upon professing ignorance of your—er—very charming self. That being so, if you wish justice—which, in fact, I promise you to the very fullest degree—"

I have said that Mr. Berford was a hard man to jar for any length of time. This little affair had shaken him more than anything I had ever seen happen to him before, and very likely the reason for that was that it had come at a time when he was utterly happy and contented with things in general. But he was himself again now. He looked as calm and strong as ever and

there was contempt on his lips as he stepped to Isaac Craven and tapped his arm.

"Pardon me, Mr. Craven," he said sharply, "but I'm not on trial here and you are not the prosecutor. Whatever all this poppycock may be, it concerns *me* and since this girl is to be examined, *I'll* examine her!"

He could be convincing when he wanted to be; Mr. Craven stared an instant and pulled down the corners of his mouth and then backed away a pace or two; and the president looked down at the girl and grinned.

"Come!" he said briskly. "There's something behind it. What's the answer, young woman?"

And the girl looked up at him and said not one solitary word with her lips; and yet, as she had done before, she said so much with her eyes that even Mr. Bennett began to fuss and frown uneasily.

"Talk, please!" Mr. Berford barked. "There's a limit to patience, you know!"

"Yes, I—know there is, Tom!" the girl said, with some difficulty. "There was a lim—limit to mine. That's why I—came here!"

"Well, what d'ye mean by that?" roared the president. I'd never seen him lose his poise so easily as he did that afternoon.

"Stop bullying her!" Craven shouted. "Stop that!"

"I'm not bullying her! What *do* you mean? Speak quite frankly, please! I have nothing to conceal! Well?"

The girl twisted her handkerchief; it seemed that she was getting ready to cry again.

"Well, I mean that—that if *you* don't want to tell them—I mean that—that I don't want to. It—*isn't* my place, Tom! *You* should tell them!"

"Uum! Uum!" said Mr. Craven.

"I haven't the most remote idea of what you're talking about!" the president snapped. "I have nothing to tell them, about you or about anything else. If you have, by all means tell them!"

And the bosom began to heave again.

"You—said you'd never even seen me before!" the girl cried.

"It's the plain truth. I never did!"

Then she looked up suddenly. She looked squarely at him—and, thunderation! how pretty she was! She looked at him, through him, into him! Her lips parted, her eyes grew bigger and, somehow, terrified.

"Tom!" she breathed, and they all bent forward to catch her words. "Tom, you haven't actually *forgotten* the ninth of January, in nineteen twenty?"

CHAPTER IV.

JANUARY 9, 1920.

OF course, I know him so well, and that may have had something to do with it; but even if I hadn't known him, I think that blank, perplexed expression of Mr. Berford's would have been nearly all the proof I needed of his innocence. It wasn't for Craven, though. That old fiend's eyes lit up quite delightedly and he nodded quickly.

"Hah!" he said. "Here's something concrete at last! What happened on January ninth, nineteen-twenty, my dear?"

The eyes turned on him sorrowfully.

"Ask Tom!" said the girl.

"I venture to say, we'll do just that—and insist on an answer!" Mr. Craven said heartily. "Berford!"

"What?"

"What happened?"

The boss was breathing hard as he faced Craven.

"What d'ye mean?" he demanded.

"Where were you—and this girl—on that date?"

"I was nowhere at all with this girl, because I never saw her before to-day. As to where I may have been myself, I can't say."

"That's odd!"

"Is it?" What were *you* doing on January ninth, four years ago, Mr. Craven?"

Craven held up one of his lean claws and smiled.

"Don't dodge the issue like that, Berford!"

"I'm dodging nothing! I don't know where I was on any given date four years

ago! You don't—Mr. Bennett doesn't—Mr. Moreland doesn't."

"That isn't just the point, Berford. A man might well enough have to think for a minute or two before he could give an account of himself on any particular date, years gone. True. We concede that. *But!*" shouted Mr. Craven and leaned so far across the table that I thought he was going to bite the president. "Certain dates in one's life are graven deep into one's mind, never to be erased. It is my impression that your January ninth is such a date! . . . Well?"

"*Bosh!*" yelled Mr. Berford.

Mr. Craven smiled wickedly and wagged his head.

"So we are to look solely to the young woman for information, eh?"

"Pray do so!"

"I shall!" smiled Isaac Craven, and approached her again. "My dear, be so good as to give us the whole story of that day?"

And here was a new one, because as she looked up at him this time, I'm blest if it didn't seem that she was turning sulky and stubborn. At all events, she tightened her lips and shook her head.

"Let Tom tell you!"

"There seems to be some slight reluctance on his part. So *you* will tell us, please. Come! Just what did happen on that date?"

The mystery merely shook her pretty head.

"No!" she said.

"But we insist upon knowing."

"No," said the girl. "Ask Tom." And she seemed really pettish about it, too. "He is the one to tell you. Not I."

Isaac Craven folded his arms and looked the president up and down.

"Well, Berford?"

"Oh, rot!" snapped the president, and banged down into his chair again. "Somebody's crazy here—more than one person, perhaps, but I'm not among the number. Settle this idiocy in whatever way best pleases yourself, Mr. Craven."

This was plain speech and I suppose it was just the way the boss felt. Anyhow, he shrugged his shoulders and began packing things back into the black brief case; and

offhand, one would have said that so far as he was concerned the matter had been closed forever.

The rest of them did not feel quite that way about it, though. Craven, of course, is a freak of nature who would hang his own twin on circumstantial evidence; but by this time Macpherson and Jones and Moreland were beginning to look a trifle dubious and even Mr. Bennett seemed rather bewildered.

He spoke just as Craven was picking words for a new assault.

"Well, a—very extraordinary situation seems to have arisen here, gentlemen," said Mr. Bennett. "While I know—while we all know, Tom—that you are incapable of anything of—er—a discreditable nature, still, at the same time—"

"*Exactly!*" said Isaac Craven—

"—there does seem to be something that needs clearing up and we'll have to clear it up, of course." His eyes were genuinely troubled as they studied the president. "It might be just as well to tell us what you were doing on that day, Tom?"

Berford laughed outright, although not merrily by any means.

"It might indeed, sir," he agreed, "except that, as I pointed out a moment ago, it happens to be impossible. My memory is fairly good, but it's not good enough to go back and collect the minor happenings of any one day years ago or—"

"The *minor* happenings?" gasped the girl.

"Pardon me?" snarled the president.

"Oh—*Tom!*" she breathed, and seemed about to die on the spot!

She had very little effect on our president, however. He shrugged and turned back to Mr. Bennett.

"You at least are reasonable," he smiled. "Try the thing yourself: what were *you* doing on January ninth, nineteen twenty?"

"Well—to save my soul from perdition, I couldn't tell you that, my boy," said Mr. Bennett.

"You, Mr. Jones?"

"Huh? Me?" Jones stared and shook his head. "I was doing something or other, around town here. Or somewhere else, doing something else."

"Precisely. So was I," the president said, with a dry smile. "How about you, Mr. Craven? What were you doing on that day?"

"Berford, it isn't my January ninth that's under consideration just now. 'It's yours.'"

"Quite so. Well, then, the very best and the very last word I can give you on the subject," said the boss—and, oh, Lord! how wrong he was about that! "is that in all probability I put in between eight and ten hours in this office, going at top speed; and that, thereafter, I took home a load of work and sat over it in my library until about two the next morning. I've been doing that four days out of six for some time. Is that satisfactory or is it not?"

Nobody said a word for a little. The girl was gazing straight at him.

"Tell them *where* you were, Tom," she said unexpectedly.

"Aha!" said Mr. Craven, and brightened instantly. "We're getting at it. Slowly, but we're getting at it."

Mr. Berford didn't brighten, though. He turned suddenly on the young woman.

"I have told them and I now tell you—although Heaven alone knows why I should be compelled to do that!—that I *don't* know where I was! That is to say, I assume that I went through my regular daily routine; but I couldn't go into court and swear that I was here or there or at any given place, without checking up in whatever way. If you happen to know, tell these gentlemen!"

He waited. They all waited. The pretty girl only closed her lips again and shook her head, looking straight at Mr. Berford.

"No, Tom!" she said quietly. "That's something you should do!"

"Well, by the—" the president began, in a sort of maddened roar; and then he caught himself and threw up his hands and turned back to the table. "I give it up, gentlemen!" he snapped. "I think the young woman is demented. If you like, try to find who who she is and where she comes from, and I'll cheerfully bet an even thousand dollars to any man's ten that nurses or distracted relatives are hunting for her at this minute."

And he went on with his packing and all five old gentlemen stared at the girl; and the girl herself, after a horrified little cry, pressed her handkerchief to her lips and rose.

"I—I didn't come here to be told that I was crazy, Tom!" she said shakily. "I—thought that you were—were at least man enough to—to—I'm *going!*" she concluded, and covered her lovely eyes.

"Well, not just yet!" Isaac Craven cried, hurriedly. "Here! Wait a minute, young woman."

"No! I didn't come here to be insulted and shouted at!"

"Well, my dear young lady, for whatever reason you may have come, you *did* come!" Mr. Craven persisted, and by this time he was at her side. "And you have made charges against our highest official which, however vague they may be at present, I have no doubt are—that is to say, you have made vague charges. You can't run away from them!"

"I haven't the slightest intention of running from them! *I'm* not the one to do the running!" the girl flashed at him.

"And Berford is, eh? You have the most remarkable way of implying things without saying them!" Mr. Craven muttered, almost admiringly. "Well, be that as it may, Miss—er—what was the name?"

"Ask Tom!"

"Be that as it may, then," pursued Isaac, "you have created a situation which must be probed to the last detail." And he turned and considered Mr. Berford, who was humming to himself as he locked the brief case. "Berford, for the last time, will you explain?"

"Mr. Craven," the president said unconcernedly and his grin was whimsical, "for the last time, I cannot explain."

Craven nodded complete understanding.

"Would you, perhaps, after twenty-four hours of ostensibly pious meditation, find yourself able to explain, Berford?" he asked.

"My dear sir," said the president, "if you refer to the young woman herself, I might meditate from now until the week after Judgment Day without being able to offer one solitary item of information—be-

cause, for the hundredth time, I never saw her before to-day. If you refer to my personal acts on that day—yes! I will look up the matter overnight and tell you precisely where I was and what I did on January ninth, nineteen twenty. Satisfactory?”

“In a qualified way, Berford,” sighed Mr. Craven, since the rest of them were nodding quick assent to this. “Shall we meet at four o’clock to-morrow, in this room?”

They agreed to that, too. Mr. Craven laid one of his claws on the young woman’s arm.

“And you will be here, too!” he stated.

“Have no fear of that. I shall be here!” the girl said, with another angry flash at our president. “May I go now? I—I can’t stand any more of this!”

Craven stepped aside with a bow. Mr. Berford bounced out of his chair.

“Wait a minute!” he cried energetically. “You’re not going to pop in here and start a riot, whatever your reasons may have been—and then escape. I wish to see you in my office, miss!”

“Oh, no, you don’t! *No, you don’t!*” Craven cried, almost wildly, and simply threw himself on Mr. Berford. “If—if—if you’re to be exonerated, it shall not be because of private threats and coercion of this girl and—stand still, sir!”

Frankly, if I had been the boss, I think I should have taken that old vulture by the neck and sent him spinning into the corner. But Mr. Berford isn’t like that. He’s as gentle and decent as they come and a child or a woman or an old man can take any sort of liberties without fear of a thrashing. So instead of giving Craven what he deserved, he stood there with his teeth gritting and watched the girl walk out as swiftly and gracefully as you please, and disappear.

For a minute or so there was a funny little lull, while Mr. Bennett got up and hurried to the president.

“Now, my dear boy, don’t look so concerned!” he cried. “Don’t take the thing so—er—seriously!”

“Because,” Macpherson sighed, “to give the devil his due, you know, we were all of us young at some time or other, and

—and she’s a very, very attractive lass, Thomas. I will say that!”

“I don’t find her so!” Mr. Berford laughed, bitterly and rather dazedly.

“There evidently was a time when you did!” Mr. Craven submitted.

“There—” the boss began, and then shrugged his shoulders. “Oh, what’s the use of letting you stir me up? Gentlemen, I’ve been accused of something or other, I take it. Just what it may be, I’ve no idea. Have any of you?”

There was a silence so dead and heavy that it startled Mr. Berford, I think. Jones sighed and pursed his lips.

“Most likely not, Tom. But it’s not impossible to do a bit of guessing!”

The boss controlled himself.

“Thanks for the vote of confidence,” he said tartly. “Shall we consider this meeting adjourned until four o’clock to-morrow afternoon? And may I say good afternoon to you all? Come, Henry!”

He started for the door and I started after him; and Mr. Moreland, who had been drumming with his fingers this last minute and looking as if his last stick of candy had dropped down the well, spoke up suddenly:

“Hold on there a minute, Tom! There’s one phase of this we haven’t taken into account!”

“Is that possible?” muttered the president.

“When this little—well, whatever it may prove to be—when this leaks out, Tom, hell’s going to begin popping for this company!”

“Piffle!” said the president, contemptuously.

“It’s nothing of the kind!” Moreland shouted savagely. “You’re blind, of course; any man in love is blind. Likely enough, you have the delusion that old George Storm’s a maligned angel, Tom, because he’s his daughter’s father. But *we* knew him before you were born, and once one word of this mess gets to his ears, he’ll move heaven and earth to smash this firm, just out of pure vindictiveness!”

Several cheeks paled a little. Even Mr. Berford went somewhat whiter, although possibly not for quite the same reason.

Moreland, surely enough, had offered a pretty little thought for consideration. Jones helped with some trimmings.

"And he could do it!" he said. "Do you all realize that? He could do it! Storm must be worth seven or eight million dollars, outside the business, and that kid of his has always been more than the apple of his eye! I'll venture to say that he would throw every last penny of his private fortune into paying off a grudge against any one he fancied had injured her!"

Craven looked like a perfect demon!

"See here!" he gasped. "Will that girl go to *him* if—if she doesn't get whatever satisfaction it is she requires from Berford?"

"Is she bright enough for that?" Macpherson breathed.

"She is!" submitted Mr. Bennett, and it was plain that for the moment the excitement had conquered even his kindly brain. "She—she's a mighty bright young woman! She was bright enough to walk in here and turn all hands upside down, at the most satisfactory moment in the history of the concern!"

"True!" said Macpherson. "True—every word of that! And what's more—"

Mr. Berford is courteous always, even if it is in his own hard, short way. I couldn't have imagined him interrupting a director in that particular fashion; yet it is the fact that just then he brought his fist down on the table with such an unearthly crash that the whole quintet jumped.

"Gentlemen!" he shouted. "I'm *through* for the day! I wish to say, for the very last time, that I am innocent of any knowledge of, or crime against, the young woman who was here. That is my complete and final statement of my side of the case and ends my connection with this—this damned tommyrot until four o'clock to-morrow afternoon, when I shall give a full account of my doings on January 9th, 1920, and then leave the rest of it in your hands. Good afternoon! Come, Henry!"

Henry, I am free to say, would have been just tickled to death to hang around that room and hear some more of the cheery thoughts the old gentlemen were going to

conjure up; but he didn't. No, Henry trotted dutifully after his employer, and once we were in the president's office, he slammed the brief case down on the desk and glared at me.

I'm no mind reader, of course, but I think he was inclined just then toward his perfectly regular and usual trick of ignoring the possibility that I might be a human being and understand a thing or two beside stenography. Would that he had done just that, then and later! But the emotional side of Mr. Berford was in too hectic a state for dignified silence!

"Henry, you're only a—*a* kid, but I'll have to talk to some one," he said suddenly.

I bowed politely.

"Say, did you ever hear of anything like that in all your days?" Mr. Berford roared.

"I never did, sir!" I said.

"Out of a clear sky—a perfectly clear sky—and at just this time! A woman I'll swear I never passed in the street or sat opposite in the subway and—*hell!*"

He sat down hard and bit his lips and stared at the desk for a minute, while I remained in the background. He glanced at his watch and snorted and got up again.

"Well, if it wasn't for the rotten side of it the thing would be funny," he observed. "However, we'll make mighty short work of it to-morrow, Henry—and after that, perhaps, we'll see what the law can do to that little devil. You were not working for me at that time, Henry?"

"I came about a year later."

"True enough. Murfon had your job, and he's somewhere in South America now, I believe. All right. I'm going home now, Henry."

"Yes, sir," I said.

"And you go to work immediately—I'm sorry to ask you to stay, but it's unavoidable this time—and run through the early 1920 correspondence of this office before you leave. Find out just what I was doing about the 9th of January, and I'll piece out the details, of course. Jot it all down and come up to my house at quarter of eight, sharp, Henry; and whatever letters you find that have a particular bearing on that date, bring along with you. And a note-

book, Henry. I want to prepare a little statement for those—er—for the directors to-morrow."

He tucked the eternal brief case under his arm. Although the effect was a trifle forced, he did look much like himself again.

"Quarter of eight—sharp!" he concluded.

And he departed, and as many years as he had been in the firm, I will venture to say that he never departed in just that frame of mind before.

CHAPTER V.

THE SANER VIEW.

THAT thing of running through the early 1920 correspondence sounded simple, of course.

Maybe it would have been simple if the president wrote more letters, and said more in those he did write; but he hates correspondence, and anything along that line that can be done by a department head is done by a department head. Another thing, Mr. Berford is probably the most cautious man in the world when it comes to wording his letters; I hammer them out on the machine, but while the fellows who read them probably know what they're about, four times out of every five I haven't much more than a strong suspicion!

And in spite of all that, getting a line on the president's activities on January 9, 1920, didn't seem much of a job—until I had been at it for half an hour. So far as I could judge, Mr. Berford had been more than ordinarily uncommunicative during the early part of that January; that, or he had been away somewhere on a trip. Since I have been with him he has had a very nice system for keeping me busy during his absences. The afternoon before his departure he has always spent dictating like a streak of greased lightning, and by the time he has returned I have cleaned up everything in the way of postponed, unimportant letters, signed them with his autograph rubber stamp, and filed away the carbons.

But back here there were gaps and gaps. The one that interested me most began on

the 4th of January, and I'm hanged if I could find trace of any letter having been written in the president's office from that date until the eleventh. The worst feature of this gap was that nothing seemed to have gone before it and nothing followed it, that would give a clew. Now in the previous November, just before one of the empty spots, there was a letter in which he said: "I expect to be in Chicago Thursday and Friday of this week;" and in December of the same year, after five days of nothing at all in the way of filed carbon copies, there was one that began: "Since talking with you in Cleveland day before yesterday," and so on.

But if this particular gap indicated a trip, it had been a different kind of trip, because there was not a solitary word in any letter of the fourth as to where he was going, and there wasn't a word in any letter after the eleventh as to where he had been. And—oh, well, I'm human, of course. I'll admit that I put in a minute or two wondering whether this queer reticence *did* mean anything, but it was only a minute or two. I know Mr. Berford, and on some counts I'm proud to work for him, because a citizen who speaks the unqualified truth just one hundred times out of a possible hundred is quite a man.

However, wondering wasn't getting me very far, and I'd been staring into those files for an hour or more, and the clock had worked beyond half past six. I hated not to make a job of it, but there was no help for that. I went off to find some dinner and then get uptown to Mr. Berford's home and tell him the worst.

He lives in a dandy old mansion, a couple of dozen steps from Central Park—one of those wide, white affairs they used to construct when land was a little cheaper and building mechanics didn't have to support servants and automobiles themselves. It seems like a lot of house for one man to occupy, but the president is fond of it; his father built it, and his parents both died there, and the place has a certain aristocratic dignity that fits the boss very nicely.

I expected to find him considerably fretted about what had happened that afternoon. He wasn't. The old butler, who must

be nearly one hundred, and has been with the family since his boyhood, showed me into the library, and pretty soon Mr. Berford himself appeared, looking like at least one million dollars in his evening togs; and so far from seeming worried, he grinned in the friendliest way and said:

"Well, Henry, where was I?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Didn't you stay and look?" the president asked, and stopped grinning.

"I did, and there wasn't a thing to be found," I said. "There wasn't a letter written in your office between the fourth and eleventh of that January and—"

"But of course there was!" he snapped. "I was in the city then; I—er—that is, I can't recall being anywhere else about that time, although it's a long while ago. You've overlooked something, Henry."

"That's possible, sir," I said; "but if I did it wasn't in your private file. I emptied the whole of that January and part of the December before on your desk, before I gave it up, and then went over every letter!"

After which, of course, one of those nasty, curt, chilly rebukes was due—and it didn't come at all! The president stared good and hard at me for a moment, and then he grinned again and shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, if there was nothing there, there was nothing there, Henry—that's all. Curious, of course, but it's not important. Sooner or later I'll remember or discover just what I was doing on that day, and when I do I'll call the directorate together and break the news. Meanwhile, there's nothing to worry about."

"Well—to-morrow, sir—" I began.

The president unbent still further. He settled down on the arm of a big chair and removed his cigar, looking whimsically at me.

"Drat to-morrow!" he said cheerfully. "I've recovered from the shock of finding my impeccable character assailed for the first time, Henry, and taken to thinking. Almost beyond question, that woman was somebody's asinine idea of a joke."

"I'd thought of that."

"Had you really, Henry?" the president

said, with a dry smile. "Well, the next time inspiration of that character comes to you in a similar crisis, don't hesitate to mention it—because I was so utterly thunderstruck that for a little while I wasn't able to think of much of anything. But that's what it was and we've seen the end of it."

"The end?"

"Of course. That pleasing young woman will never return."

"Why not, sir?"

"Well, as nearly as I can follow the probable working of the sort of brain that must have been behind that performance, its chief virtue lay in its surprise quality. You can't very well repeat the same surprise. Also, should she turn up again, she'd be virtually certain to run into a real third degree and, possibly enough, some unpleasant consequences. She won't turn up."

"I hope not, sir," I said.

"Oh, she won't, Henry!" snapped the president and it was plain that he was growing a trifle impatient with me for not agreeing instantly in the optimistic view. "She'll never— Yes, Evans!"

"It's Mrs. Storm and Miss Alicia, Mr. Tom," said the butler and showed all three of his teeth in a smile. "Come to take you to the theater, sir, I believe, and sending word in from the car that—"

The president left that chair like a ten-year-old kid! He was out of the room before the butler had finished.

"Right, Evans! Good night, Henry—and thanks!" he called.

There was an end of him for that night! The butler came back with my hat and coat in about five minutes and I went home, feeling almost foolish—I don't know why. Maybe it was because I'd been worrying like sin about not having been able to get the boss all vindicated with carbon copies; whereas, in point of fact, the whole affair seemed to have slipped from his own shoulders like a drop of water from a duck's back! However, if he wasn't concerning himself about the strange lady, there was no reason why I should; I had all but forgotten her myself by bedtime.

And he was quite as cheerful when he appeared at the office next morning! He

wore the same rapt expression that had come over his face when the butler announced that Miss Alicia was waiting for him; he hummed little tunes; he was just floating around on a pretty pink cloud!

"Oh!—I'd nearly forgotten," he said, when he had been down for half an hour or more. "No word from the lady of yesterday, I take it?"

"No, sir."

"Won't be," grunted the president, and reached over for the three letters at his left. "Letter to James R. Gribton, Henry; ready?"

There is something very convincing about Mr. Berford, in whatever he says or does. By two o'clock, for no particular reason except that she hadn't telephoned or materialized, I began to feel quite sure myself that the fool girl would never show her face again. Up to that time I had been more than dubious about it, but those little hummed tunes and that new grin of his did their work on me, too. When four o'clock came and the directors sent in word that they were assembled and ready to pass sentence, I marched in with Mr. Berford with much the same jaunty step!

There was nothing jaunty about the directorate. No sign of a smile appeared on one of those five faces, although Mr. Bennett did make a sickly effort at one. They just nodded and grunted their several greetings as the president took his place and then all hands sighed. To have made the picture perfect, there should have been a body on the table!

"Shall we—er—open the meeting formally?" Mr. Berford said, with a smile.

Craven looked at his watch.

"Hey? No, Berford. Not necessary yet. It's only eight minutes past four. Girl's late. Women always are, of course. No, we'll do nothing until she gets here!"

The president shrugged and grinned.

"I'm afraid that we're destined to do very little at this meeting, then."

"What does that mean?"

Mr. Berford looked at him tolerantly.

"Well, Mr. Craven, I'll confess that as yet I haven't guessed the complete answer to yesterday's nonsense. Eventually, you may be sure that I mean to find it and to

take proper action. But I am convinced that somewhere among my friends or acquaintances there is one congenital idiot who sent that girl here as a joke. She will not be with us again to-day."

Craven sat up and stared.

"Oho! She won't, hey?"

"She will not!" said the boss, so convincingly that Mr. Bennett relaxed!

Craven smiled wickedly.

"So, after all, you managed to find her and to fix her!" he exclaimed.

"I did what?" thundered the president, and glared at him so suddenly, so terribly that Craven pushed back his chair and laid his hands on the arms, all ready for flight! "No, sir! I did not! And by the Almighty—"

"There, Tom, there!" Mr. Bennett put in hurriedly. "We—the rest of us—know perfectly well that you did nothing of the sort. And as for you, Craven, be suspicious, if you must. You can't help it, I suppose. But for Heaven's sake don't make yourself ridiculous!"

The soured director nodded rather dizzily.

"You—I fear that you misconstrued the thought behind the question," he said. "It impressed me that, after all, this had been the wisest thing to do in the circumstances. That is to say, if the girl had been—or has been—satisfactorily silenced, Berford, you need have no slightest hesitation, so far as I am concerned, in speaking frankly of the matter. Yesterday, I was inclined to see the affair straight through on its—ah—demerits. To-day I should be vastly pleased, Berford, at any positive assurance you may be able to give that the woman is permanently out of the way!"

Once more, the president was calm enough to grin as he lit his cigar.

"I would go far to please you, Mr. Craven," he said, "but as it happens, the idea of squaring her for something I'd never done did not occur to me; and, had it, I should have found myself without a suspicion of where the lady was to be located." His tone grew more brisk as he turned to the others. "How long are we to wait?"

"Oh, until quarter past," Jones said. "If she's not here by that time, she's not coming."

"No, make it half past four," Craven suggested quickly. "Any woman might easily be delayed fifteen minutes."

"And if she has not appeared by that time, we are to assume that the pleasure of her presence is to be denied us?"

"Huh? I presume so," Craven grunted.

"I'm quite as willing to make it five o'clock or half past five," the president said.

"Four thirty'll do!" said Craven.

He sat back with his watch in his hand. Perhaps the rest of them would have liked to do the same thing, but with Craven, the horrible example of a director, keeping tabs on the time, they refrained. Instead, Bennett started a nice little conversation about some of the finer points of Mr. Berford's annual report to the directors and the others joined in readily. The boss himself smoked and grinned contentedly.

And the minutes jogged along and there was nothing to be seen by the eye I kept on the door. After what seemed a long, long while, Moreland yawned and said:

"Must be more than half past now, isn't it, Craven?"

"It is twenty-eight minutes after!"

"Two more, eh? What were you saying, Mac?"

Macpherson went on with what he had been saying and it took time. Mr. Craven, presently clicked together the case of his old-fashioned watch and, with a sigh, dropped it into his pocket; and Mr. Bennett cried:

"Half past?"

"It is twenty-five minutes to five."

"Hey? Five minutes past the limit, is it?" said the genial director, and treated us to that big laugh of his. "Well, by George! I think you're vindicated, Tom!"

"Thanks," the president said briefly.

"In all our minds?"

"Yes!" said four old gentlemen, together.

"In your mind, Craven? Hey? Speak up!" snapped Bennett.

"Eh? Hum—I suppose so!"

Farther than that, apparently, he did not care to go. Mr. Bennett turned away quite disgustedly and looked fondly at our president.

"Now, Thomas, I think this absurd matter is closed!"

"And the meeting adjourned?"

"Yes!"

The president leaned forward unsmilingly.

"Well, before this gathering breaks up, may I be permitted a word or two of a purely personal nature?"

"A thousand of them!"

"All right. Gentlemen!" the boss said slowly. "I have been with this firm almost since boyhood. It pleased you, some years back, to make me its president. In all the time that I have been connected with the company, you have had every ounce of everything that was in me. I have had hardly another thought, hardly another reason for existence, than service to this company. I'm not trying to pose as the perfect man—far from that. But I do feel compelled to say that never in all my life, in this office or out of it, have I consciously lied or consciously done a wrong thing or—"

"Why, we know that well enough!" Macpherson cried.

"Yes, but you didn't know it yesterday and you didn't know it until half past four to-day!" said Mr. Berford and, quiet as he was trying to be, his words dripped bitterness. "Yesterday, through the agency of some fool, a woman came in here and accused me of—I don't know what and you don't know what. And within five minutes of that time suspicion of myself was extremely evident!"

"Well, you see, Tom," Mr. Jones began, "human nature's what it is and not what it ought to be, and when that girl popped in so unexpectedly—"

"You immediately concluded that I was the man who had ruined her life, or something of the kind. That's just what I'm talking about. Gentlemen, if suspicion of my personal or my business character is really so near the surface as appears, it seems to me that the time has come to tender my resignation!"

Three seconds, they stared at him. Then they began to boil! They surged out of their chairs, even to Craven, and came around to Mr. Berford, all talking and pro-

testing at once, all trying to pat him or wave their hands before him. They babbled for one full, noisy minute before Bennett's big voice rose above the tumult.

"Oh, my dear boy! My dear boy! That's preposterous! Natural—don't blame you a bit—but preposterous! Can't be contemplated for an instant! The firm couldn't run without you! Shows what a lot of old imbeciles can do to a wonderful man and—see here, gentlemen!"

They subsided and looked at him.

"We owe Tom about as abject an apology as it is possible to make! That's my sense of the matter. Is it yours?"

It seemed to be.

"And it shall be made! It is made, right here and now, Tom! In the name of this board, I beg your pardon!"

"Well, perhaps it's not necessary to—" the president began with a faint smile.

"Yes, it is! Yes, it is! And we'll put the thing into lasting form, Tom! We'll put it into such shape that you'll be able to poke it under our noses if ever we try the same trick on you again! We'll adopt a set of resolutions and have them properly engrossed and presented to you, Tom. Upon my word, that's precisely what we'll do!" said the repentant director, and the others nodded. "We'll put them in shape at once. Henry!"

"Yes, sir?" I said.

"I wish to dictate them to you. Take them down very carefully and give me a type-written copy just as soon as possible. Now, let me see. Now—let me think a moment!"

He scowled heavily and thought; and I sat there and waited and also did some thinking.

Because really it was a queer thing to watch, the way a man not thirty-five could dominate those old gentlemen. He always

seemed to do it when he wanted to; he was doing it now, and he had them licked! Even Craven had given up glancing at the door and seemed about as conscience-stricken as the rest of them. Maybe it was the memory of our president's father, who must have been an even more wonderful man; whatever it was, that threat of resigning on the spot had given them all a shock.

"Here! I have it, I think!" Mr. Bennett said suddenly. "If any of you have any suggestions to make, hold me up and make them. Ready, Henry? We'll say something like this: Whereas, by reason of a most unfortunate and baseless charge made by an unknown woman against—"

"Make that 'person' instead of 'woman,'" Macpherson suggested, cautiously. "That might be found lying around fifty years after Tom was dead and start any sort of scandal in his family."

"Eh? Yes, that's true, I suppose. That's a good idea. Where was I? Oh, yes—made by an unknown person, Henry. Make that person. Unknown person, this board has seemed to censure its beloved—"

The reason he stopped there, I presume, was that he saw that I was no longer listening. It was the truth—I wasn't! Beautiful as those resolutions promised to be, they just drifted away before what was happening over by the door.

The knob had turned with an abrupt jerk and the confounded door was opening. And it stopped and for two or three seconds I sighted what looked like Jimmy, the office boy, having a wrestling match with somebody. Then suddenly Jimmy got the worst of it and disappeared, and the portal swung wide open and in she came, the same pretty girl in the same quiet clothes.

She was nearly an hour late, of course—but she was *there*!

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



THE 186TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

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By CLARENCE E. MULFORD, author of "Hopalong Cassidy," etc.

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Nothing But Money

By FRED MACISAAC

A NOVELETTE IN TWO PARTS—PART I

CHAPTER I.

TREASURE TROVE.

EIGHT THIRTY o'clock of a winter morning is disagreeable anywhere, but it was particularly unpleasant on the front end of a Jersey City ferryboat jammed with shivering Jerseyites bound for work in the skyscrapers of lower Manhattan.

Harry Hilwin stood next to the rail, his collar turned up and his hands thrust deep in his pockets. When the man beside him jostled him slightly he did not look pleased, but the offender apologized, and Hilwin, a good natured young man, grinned cheerfully back.

"Water looks cold, doesn't it?" remarked the stranger, a lean, angular man of about sixty, who tossed a cigarette into the Hudson as he spoke.

The river was filled with floating ice;

it was gray and white in the dull morning light.

"Not a good day for a swim," replied Hilwin perfunctorily.

"There is no accounting for taste," answered the other with a queer smile. "You look like a good sort. I make you a present of my bag."

As he spoke he swung one leg over the railing, followed it with the other, and before the astonished Hilwin could reach him, he dived into the river.

Almost petrified with horror, Hilwin shrieked, "Man overboard!"

A dozen others repeated the cry. There was a clanging of bells, blowing of whistles, somebody tossed a lifebuoy over; deck hands rushed to lower a boat; the paddle wheels stopped; women screamed.

Hilwin had followed the flight of the body with his eye. He had seen it hit a cake of ice and slide off into the gray

water. It did not reappear. The boat, when lowered, found no trace of the suicide.

The passengers talked excitedly. It was quite a thrill for the ordinary suburbanite on his way to work. The captain of the ferryboat, accompanied by a policeman who happened to be crossing, approached Hilwin.

"The man who jumped over was talking to you, wasn't he?"

"Yes."

"Did you know him?"

"No. Just happened to be standing alongside of me."

"Did he say anything about what he was going to do?"

"No. I said the water was pretty cold for a swim, and he laughed and said there was no accounting for tastes. Then he jumped. He did it so quickly I didn't have a chance to stop him."

"That's that," said the policeman, "shutting his notebook. 'Takes all kinds of people to make a world.'"

After they had gone Hilwin remembered the suicide had presented him with his bag. He looked around for it and saw an ordinary black traveling satchel at his feet.

"I suppose I ought to turn it over to the police," he reflected. "Guess I'll have a look first. After all, he gave it to me and it's a good bag. Don't suppose there is anything valuable in it or he wouldn't have committed suicide."

So when the ferryboat tied up at her slip, Hilwin picked up the black bag and walked ashore with it.

"No use of dragging the thing all the way to the office. Might as well check it somewhere."

Accordingly he left it at a fruit store which picked up small change by checking parcels for folks coming off the ferries.

Hilwin was an assistant auditor in a cotton brokerage house in the Woolworth Building. He was twenty-four years old, unmarried and earned twenty-five dollars per week. A graduate of Princeton, three years out of college, he had found the business of living rather difficult. Many college men acquire influential friends, own wealthy relatives and make valuable acquaintances, but Hilwin, despite his success as a football

player, had been forced to rely strictly upon his own.

Like many youngsters, he felt that he was not doing well; that he was underpaid and unappreciated, and such an attitude on his part made him a bit careless regarding his work. He was twenty minutes late at the office this morning.

Braden, his deckmate, grinned at him disagreeably. "This time you are going to get it, old man. Simpson was looking for you and it sounds like the dead march."

Rather nervously Harry entered the inner office, where J. E. Simpson, head of the firm, lurked in his lair.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Hilwin. This makes the fourth time you have been late in three weeks."

"I've worked overtime ten nights in a month without complaining to do the work piled up as a result of insufficient help in the outer office," replied Harry with spirit.

"Well, well," said the cotton magnate. "Is that a fact? I don't like overtime. I don't ask it. I think a first class accountant would not have to putter over his books ten nights in three weeks. I am afraid you will break down from overwork, Mr. Hilwin. I wouldn't have it on my conscience. Get your time, Mr. Hilwin. Get your time."

He busied himself with the papers on his desk and Harry slid out of the office quietly and considerably crestfallen.

"So that's how it feels to be fired," he mused as he sauntered in an ostentatiously careless fashion to his desk, ignoring the inquiring glances of Braden. However, his packing preparations were unmistakable.

"Gee, old man, I didn't think he would really can you," said Braden, contritely. "I'm sorry I laughed at you. I thought it was just a tongue lashing."

"I wasn't canned. I resigned. I told him that I had worked ten nights in the last three weeks without complaining, and I didn't see why he should kick if I were a few minutes late in the morning."

"You talked to him like that? It's a wonder he didn't bite you."

"I'd like to see him try it," snorted Hilwin. "I'm sick of this place anyway. The next time you see me I'll have a real job."

"Get one for me while you are about it. Meanwhile if a couple of dollars will help you—"

"Thanks, old man. That's decent of you, but I am getting my salary two days ahead of time, so I'm flush."

In a few minutes Harry had shaken hands all around, visited the cashier and left the office. At nine forty-five in the morning he found himself unemployed. It didn't feel so good. He lived with cousins in Jersey City, and while they wouldn't press him for his room rent, he knew they needed it. A new job was an immediate necessity.

"Think I'll go back and have a look at that poor fellow's bag," he told himself as he reached the Broadway pavements. "Then I'll go through the want ads, though it's too late to have much luck with them to-day."

In a few minutes he had repossessed himself of the satchel and was looking around for a quiet spot where he might explore its contents. One of the ferry waiting rooms suggested itself to him as a place where a man might fumble with a grip not his own without attracting attention. At that hour the outgoing boats were empty.

Once seated in an unoccupied section, he attempted to satisfy his curiosity, but none of his keys would fit. He was unable to slip the lock by jerking at it, and at the end of five minutes the thing was still unopened. It was not an expensive bag, and he could always cut the leather, or rather the imitation leather, of which it was made, but that was a thief's trick, and any policeman seeing him carrying a bag with a cut in the side would promptly investigate.

"Well," thought Harry, "I didn't go to bed until two this morning, and I have no work to do. I could use a few hours' sleep, and I have money in my pocket. The thing to do is hire a room in some cheap hotel, cut the bag and see what's in it. Even if there are only a few clean shirts, they will be worth the price of the room. Besides there may be some papers that would tell about the suicide. Then I might sell the story to a newspaper."

These arguments decided him. He left

the ferry, picked out a small, fairly clean hotel, where they still rented rooms at a dollar, and found himself in a dingy cell, with a sad looking mattress on the single bed.

As soon as he had locked the door, and taken off his coat and vest, he drew his penknife and ripped a long slit in the side of the bag.

It was full of money.

Unable to believe his eyes, he began pulling the green contents out, and throwing them on the bed. There were neat packages of treasury notes, mostly in denominations of twenty, and they were packed so tightly in the bag they did not come out easily. His knife had ripped one package nearly in two.

Remember that Harry was a low salaried clerk. He had never owned more than two or three hundred dollars at one time in his life. The sight of a pile of greenbacks a foot high, lying on the bed, almost unhinged his mind.

"They must be counterfeit," he thought, and he examined the packages more closely. But if they were spurious, they were done so cleverly that none but an expert could detect them.

If not counterfeit, then they must have been stolen. The suicide had been a bank cashier, robbed his bank and started for New York. Perhaps his crime had preyed on his mind, and the idea of prison so overpowered him that he preferred to die in the river.

In that case, what bank did he rob? Where was he from? There was nothing in the bag to tell. Not a scrap of paper. No change of underwear, nothing but money.

Undoubtedly the bank would pay a big reward for the return of the stolen cash. On the other hand, wasn't there danger in approaching a bank and suggesting that its money was in his possession?

All sorts of strange thoughts crowded into Hilwin's head. He imagined that covetous eyes were gazing at him, and he hastened to pull down the window shade, and cover the keyhole with his hat.

"What am I going to do? What can I do? Supposing, oh, supposing I could keep this money myself. He gave it to me.

It was a bequest. Perhaps he wasn't a thief, only crazy. If the money was rightfully his, then it is rightfully mine. But if he were crazy his heirs could get it away from me.

First it had better be counted, and then hidden. Being an accountant by trade, he went about the tabulation in a businesslike manner with a pencil and a sheet of paper. There were one hundred and fifty packages of notes. There were fifty twenty dollar bills in each package except ten packages which held fifty hundred dollar bills. The total contents of the bag was one hundred and ninety thousand dollars.

Convinced of this Harry feverishly stuffed the bills back into the bag, regretting now that he had cut it so carelessly. He regretted also that he had picked his hotel so casually. In one of these water front hostelrys they would murder a man for a tenth of two hundred thousand dollars.

His head was aching with excitement. Utterly inexperienced, he was completely at a loss what to do. Where can a man hide two hundred thousand dollars? A rich man, like old Simpson, could walk into his bank and deposit it to his account without creating a ripple of interest or suspicion. Hilwin realized that a penniless clerk who tried to open an account with a handbag full of greenbacks would probably arrive at police headquarters. To keep the money about his person was impossible—too bulky. As to leaving the bag in a hotel room, that would be utter madness.

By this time Hilwin had decided to keep the money if he could. Not having any other information he felt he had a right to believe that it had belonged to the man who bequeathed it to him. If it developed that the fellow was a thief and the persons who had been robbed proved their claim, then perhaps he would give it up, but he was human enough to feel that they would have to find him first before they had a chance to prove ownership. "Finding's keepings" and "possession is nine-tenths of the law," were the adages he adopted for his consolation.

He was not unaware that the strictly ethical thing to do was to take the bag to police headquarters and report all the cir-

cumstances connected with finding it, but he felt that the authorities would hold the treasure, and if there did happen to be a reward offered for it, would probably prevent him from getting much of it. At least that was his opinion of the police.

Nevertheless, he was in a perplexing situation. He wished to attract no attention to himself whatever, and every expedient which occurred to him seemed sure to draw curious eyes.

Renting a safety deposit box suggested itself to him, but even that meant giving references and perhaps an explanation of why a young man in his simple circumstances should need a very large box.

The first thing to do was to get rid of the damaged satchel, and he decided to let future operations wait on that. Common sense told him his bag would be safe for a few minutes in the room he had just rented, and when he saw a key in a closet door he determined to take that chance. However, in case the bag might vanish during his absence he filled his overcoat pockets with several packages of greenbacks.

He found a leather shop near by and purchased another bag in very short order. He almost ran back, and his heart sank sickeningly when he reached his room, for the door stood open and a maid was bustling around.

"Oh, I thought you'd left, sir," she grimaced and went out. He tried the closet door. Still locked. His hand trembled as he opened it. Glory be, the treasure was still his!

During the walk to the store he had decided that his next move must be to a first class hotel, where a man laden down with money wouldn't attract so much attention. Carrying both bags, but with the money transferred to the good one, he left the water front tavern and hailed a taxi. On the way uptown he decided to leave the torn bag inside the taxi, rather a stupid thing, but Hilwin was young in crime.

He left the taxi at the door of the Hotel Pendorf, and saw it drive swiftly away, carrying the suicide's bag. Then it struck him that the next passenger would discover it, and seeing the slit in its side, suspect a robbery. Investigation would lead back to

the Pendorf, which meant that he would better place a good part of the city between him and that pretentious caravansary. Hilwin's wealth was causing him more worry already than the last six months' labor in Simpson's cotton office.

At the Mastodon, where he arrived in another taxi, he registered under his own name before he thought that it might not be the best thing to do. Docilely he followed the bellhop to the elevator, a deep furrow in his boyish brow.

Once in his room he stretched out on the bed and tried to remember all the detective stories he had ever read.

He didn't recall any of the heroes of light fiction who were in his peculiar predicament. There were plenty of persons who eloped with bags of money or securities, but they never seemed worried about ways and means. Here he was, with a fortune come by honestly, so far as he knew, and he was completely embarrassed. He imagined he had aged years since morning.

One idea came to him as he lay flat on his back. He would put the packages of hundred dollars bills in a neat bundle and have them locked in the office safe. He would also carry as much as he dared in the pockets of his clothes.

He felt, and rightly, that he was in a different world at the Mastodon from the business section down town and the Jersey suburbs. Those hundreds of thousands of underpaid clerks who inhabit the tall office buildings of lower Broadway during the day, and live in the backwoods of Jersey or Brooklyn in small flats or installment cottages were as remote from the Mastodon and Park Avenue as if they were living in a different planet. Occasionally a naughty stenographer might invade these precincts financed by her employer; but the clerks? Never.

And even the theater district of Times Square would be completely blighted if its patronage depended upon the work bees of the lower Broadway hives.

No, Hilwin felt he could stop at the Mastodon, spend money freely and get his treasure safely deposited somewhere without danger of recognition from his former associates. A telegram to his relatives in Jer-

sey that he was spending a few days with friends in New York would allay that anxiety.

And for the first time he began to consider the delights of money. Remember that Harry was a college man. In his salad days he had enjoyed glimpses into the sunny places of life. To live luxuriously at a first class hotel. To purchase tickets for the front rows of the musical comedies from the speculators. To dine in the expensive restaurants and look at the beautiful women in their jewels and furs. To become acquainted with such beauties and entertain them himself. To travel in a deep cushioned and glittering automobile. To golf, and ride horseback. To attend Bohemian parties where wine was drunk from satin slippers. To exchange persiflage, perhaps even to make love to actresses whose photographs he had admired in the magazines. Money could secure all this for him. And being young, fairly good looking, and unmarried, these things seemed worth while to Hilwin.

He shivered with delight just thinking about them. And he was inclined to believe that a year or two of such delights would be worth any penalty.

"Supposing I could live like a millionaire for a couple of years. And supposing then they found out that I had no right to the money. They couldn't take away the fun I'd had, and jail wouldn't be much worse than going back to the grimy grind I've just escaped from."

There was no key for the closet in this hotel room, but Hilwin locked the bag, after abstracting his packages of hundred dollar notes, and carefully wrapping them up in hotel stationery. Then he sauntered carelessly to the office and, shoving them through the cashier's grill, said: "Kindly put these packages in the safe."

CHAPTER II.

A CLOSE SHAVE.

LET us pass over the next couple of days. Hilwin summoned courage to open accounts in two neighboring banks for five thousand dollars each, offering cash,

which was accepted without comment, and securing a waiver of references on the ground that he was stopping at the Mastodon and had no friends in the city. He also laid in a supply of clothing, suitable to a wealthy young man living at an expensive hostelry.

Harry always had had ideas regarding clothing; ideas which he had hitherto been unable to gratify. Three or four hundred dollars were well spent in this direction. Despite all his efforts, however, the money bag remained two-thirds full. It now reposed in a very good trunk with a special lock, and it didn't worry him so much.

He had read all the papers with minute care. The suicide was dismissed with a few lines, and no bank robbery loomed portentously in the headlines.

It was about seven in the evening. Harry, in a well-fitting dinner suit, was lolling in a big chair in the lobby, looking rather wistfully at the throng of pretty women who walked about or parked themselves on the hotel couches and easy chairs awaiting their men. A few of them cast glances at Hilwin which would have meant something to a more experienced lounge lizard. It never occurred to him that any of them could be casually encountered.

A youth about his own age, with sharp features and the rather shifty glance of a certain type of New Yorker dropped into the next chair.

"Great place to see life," he observed, drawing a gold cigarette case from his pocket, lighting a cigarette, and offering the case to Hilwin.

"It sure is," replied Harry, whose solitary grandeur was getting on his nerves.

"Some of these wrens ain't so magnificent as they look," added the stranger. "Sure thing some of them are on the pick-up. Bet we could grab off a couple if we started to work.

"Don't try it. I live here."

"You live here? How long?"

"Oh, three or four days."

"Pretty steep, isn't it?"

"I wouldn't want to stand it indefinitely."

"Guess not. Say, what was in that bag?"

The bottom fell out of the world for Hilwin. He had played poker enough to keep a fairly wooden face, but inside he simply curled up.

"Wha-what bag?" he stammered.

"Don't pull that stuff. I was standing right near you on the ferryboat. I saw you walk off with the bag of the guy who jumped overboard."

"Oh!" said Harry. "That bag."

"Yeh. Thought you'd remember it."

"And you think I stole it?"

"Saw you grab it, kid."

"If you were standing alongside of me you must have heard him make me a present of it."

"Can't say I did. But I'm not blaming you for walking off with the bag. Would have done it myself if I'd thought of it. What was in it?"

"Nothing but some soiled linen. I threw it away."

"Didn't even keep the bag?"

"No. Why should I? I have plenty of bags and it wasn't a good one."

"Funny thing for a guy who lives at the Mastodon to do; walk off with that bag," remarked the inquisitor. "You didn't look as though you belonged up here that morning on the ferryboat."

"I don't see why I should answer these questions," complained Hilwin with what indignation he could muster. "You don't suppose a man with anything valuable in his possession would have committed suicide?"

"Not likely. How about pawn tickets? Were there any?"

"There were not," retorted Hilwin emphatically. "Now let's drop the subject."

"You looked to me like one of those twenty-dollar-a-week clerks," continued the unwelcome acquaintance. "Kind of a quick change for you."

A laughing group stopped in front of the two men at this instant. There were four girls and three men. One of the latter glanced casually at the pair and recognition dawned in his eyes.

"If it isn't Harry Hilwin!" he exclaimed.

"Harry, I haven't seen you since twenty-one. Look, Bill, it's old Hilwin, Princeton, twenty-one!"

Bill gave a whoop of joy and both pounced upon Harry. A college reunion followed; exclamations, reminiscences, do-you-recalls *ad nauseum*—at least, to the simple stranger who had been interrogating Harry.

"What you're doing to-night doesn't matter. You're with us," cried the chap who had seen him first. "Meet the girls. Girls, this is Harry Hilwin, Princeton, twenty-one. Played on the varsity, pitched for the baseball team. Regular guy. He's coming with us. Miss Mabel Boardman, Miss Helen Swan, and Miss Ruth Simpson.

Hilwin acknowledged the introductions with a little embarrassment. He was shaken by his interview with the fellow ferry-boat voyager, and he felt that the interruption was very opportune. Surely the recognition by a wealthy party of this sort must convince the sharp-visaged man that he didn't owe his apparent prosperity to the suicide's bag.

"Where are we going?" he demanded.

"Dinner here. Then theater. Afterward we're bound for a Russian joint. Ruth knows it. What's the name of that place, Ruthie?"

"Club Petroushka."

"That's it. Tough on false teeth."

Chattering noisily they entered the dining room, leaving a much puzzled young man sitting alone.

"Name's Harry Hilwin. Seems to belong all right. However, won't do any harm to investigate." These were his musings. He rose and strolled carelessly toward the phone booths. From one of these he called the hotel desk.

"I want to talk to Harry Hilwin. What's his room number, please?"

"Hilwin. Just a minute. Room 1004."

The unknown hung up, and jotted down the number in a little memo book.

"Well, Harry, old socks," he said under his breath. "I'll just take a look through your bridal suite while you're whispering sweet nothings into the shell-like ear of one of those wrens."

Then he chuckled silently.

In the dining room meanwhile Harry was sitting between two distractingly pretty girls who kept asking embarrassing questions.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, Mr. Hilwin? Dancing men are scarce, and you have been very mean not to let your college chums know how to find you."

Hilwin smiled, a little bitterly. These men were classmates, but hardly chums. They had parted after commencement without regret, for they had never traveled the same paths in college. Even there men with money and those with none found little in common. He knew that in his capacity as a clerk in lower Broadway he would be lucky if he got a cool nod of recognition from these fellows. To-night at the Mastodon, after a couple of cocktails, in a party where one man had failed to show up, they had fallen on his neck because he was presentable and apparently prosperous.

"I hope you'll let me make up for lost time," he parried. "I am going to be in New York right along, and I'm unmarried and undoubtedly a great catch for any girl."

This sally was greeted with peals of laughter, and all four girls proposed to him at once after the brazen manner of the girl of 1924.

"I'll watch you all work this evening and reserve my decision," he informed them.

Bill Cromwell nodded approvingly and whispered to Jimmie Slaven: "Hilwin was on the teams, but not in the societies. Don't remember seeing much of him."

"Always a good sort," indorsed Slaven with the pride of a discoverer. "Knew he would fit in all right. That's why I annexed him."

The dinner was a very elaborate affair. Hilwin quivered with fright at the prices on the menu and could not prevent himself from doing problems in mental arithmetic to estimate the total amount of the orders. And then he recalled that his pockets were bulging with money and he could afford to pay for many such dinners.

"Did you ever meet my father down town?" demanded Ruth Simpson, having extracted from Hilwin that he had been in business in lower Manhattan. "He's a cotton broker. They say he's a hard man to beat in a deal."

Old Simpson's daughter! That was a coincidence. Hilwin could imagine the old man's face if he thought his daughter was

cooing pleasantly into the ear of the clerk he had fired a few days before. And caution told him that he must not become friendly with Miss Simpson, because her father was one person who knew him for what he was.

It was going to be hard snubbing Miss Simpson, however. She was one of those girls whose eyes made you think of limpid pools and whose smile seemed to bathe you in radiance. And she was apparently interested in Harry. Her own crowd declared she was making a dead set at him.

Harry's acquaintance with girls since he left college had been limited by his pocket-book. Girls mean expense in New York. Theaters, motion pictures, dinners, dances are required of every young man who wishes to make good. He knew a number of girls in Jersey who would consent to let him park in their parlors, but even these required escort to a dance or a theater occasionally. And what these little attentions had been wont to do to his twenty-five dollars per!

A girl of Miss Simpson's type was a new experience for him. Not much prettier perhaps than the stenographers and bookkeepers of his acquaintance, she had the aid of hairdresser, modistes, jewelers, furriers and beauty shops to accentuate her natural advantages. And she had the confidence of a society girl, the experience of a hundred flirtations, and the amazingly frank, almost masculine way of talking which modern New York girls have adopted.

When a beautiful little thing you have just met, on whom you hope you might make an impression, suddenly looks at you pleadingly and says: "I love you. Will you marry me?" it sort of takes your breath away. It's unfair, embarrassing and it knocks a man who isn't used to such treatment off his pins. And if such an unprovoked assault causes the victim to blush, hesitate and possibly accept the offer it fills the little hussy with unholy glee.

Pocket flasks circulated freely and it was nearly nine o'clock when the crowd decided to move on to the theater. In two taxis they set out for Broadway. In some manner Ruth Simpson fell to Harry and she snuggled against him in the cab in a most

inviting manner. When he was slow in putting his arm around her she grabbed it and personally placed it in proper position herself, asking almost petulantly:

"Where were you brought up?"

The play was a musical comedy, full of pretty girls and poor comedians. Musically it was like all the rest. Harry thought it marvelous, however, because of the company he was in, the drinks he had enjoyed, and the general hilarity. Suddenly, toward the end of the second act, a sharp shiver ran through him. He remembered the inquisitive stranger in the lobby and the bag of money, unguarded in his room. After his peek into paradise to-night it would be too cruel if anything happened to his treasury. He must get away for a little while.

Almost rudely he excused himself to Ruth Simpson and the rest, saying he would join them later at the Club Petroushka, and tore up the aisle. To jump into a taxi and reach the Mastodon was the matter of a few minutes.

"My key," he demanded of the clerk at the desk.

The clerk looked in the rack. "Not here, Mr. Hilwin. Isn't it in your pocket?"

"No, indeed," replied Harry after a rapid search.

A second clerk looked around. "Why, I sent up your key a few minutes ago, Mr. Hilwin. You phoned downstairs that you had gone up without it and I sent it up by a bellboy."

"I must have missed him," muttered Harry, making for the elevator, his mind in a whirl.

Evidently that crook in the lobby had got into his room. By this time the bag might be gone. The elevator stopped at the tenth floor and he darted toward his room. The key was in the lock outside. He threw open the door and beheld an alarming spectacle. The trunk was open. Seated on his bed was the rat-faced youth from the lobby, blandly counting the contents of the bag.

This person looked up, recognized the invader and remarked with a sigh of relief:

"Oh, it's you. I didn't expect you back for hours."

"How dare you break into my room? Put that money back. I'll turn you over to the police," exclaimed Hilwin in righteous indignation.

The burglar put his hand in his pocket and drew out an ugly looking little automatic.

"Ever see one of these things? If you had any sense you'd have bought a couple yourself, with all this jack to guard. Sit down, kid, and make yourself at home. Sit down, I said!"

"You wouldn't dare shoot."

"Wouldn't I? Say, for a quarter of what's here I'd riddle you so full of holes you'd look like a sieve. Don't kid yourself you're up against anything soft. How much money was there in this bag?"

"What you see."

"You must have spent some of it. Those glad rags. All the clothes in that closet. I'll bet you're carrying a wad right now. However, there's nothing small about me. I ain't going to ask you to make good what you've spent."

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it," with a graceful wave of the hand carrying the automatic. "Why do you suppose a guy with all this jack wanted to jump off the ferry? It beats me. You know I almost fell for your story about a couple of dirty shirts being all you found, but I'm one of those careful ginks that likes to check things up. Efficiency, that's my middle name. So I waited till I saw you folks start for the theater, and then I allowed you an hour to get interested in the play, and then I started to work. I came up here and phoned down to the clerk to send a bellboy up with your key. Figured they might know you at the desk, but that a bellboy wouldn't. Worked like a charm. It's a wonder more hotel rooms ain't robbed, it's so easy to get into them."

"I'm not interested in your methods," said Hilwin bitterly.

"Aw, be sociable. Just to show what a good guy I am, I ain't going to bother to count this. I ain't going to ask how much you got away with."

"Thanks!"

"But there's the matter of making my getaway that's bothering me. All I need

to do is to get out of the hotel without attracting any attention, because I'm not worrying about you getting the police on my trail. Not you. You're too scared they'll ask you where you got the money. So all I have to do is to fix you so you won't make any fuss as I exit. Of course, I didn't expect you back, but I always carry a little bottle of chloroform. I'll just give you enough to put you to sleep for a half an hour or so, and then everything will be O. K."

The chatty robber was sitting on the bed during this conversation. Hilwin had dropped into a chair about three feet away. The crook was covering him with the automatic held in his right hand and he now began to fumble in his vest pocket for the phial of chloroform.

When Hilwin went to Princeton he had played football for four years and one of the best things he did was to punt. So confident was the crook that he was dealing with a frightened amateur in violence that he dropped his eyes toward the hand which was feeling in his vest pocket. As he did so Harry's right foot shot out and his patent leathered toe struck the hand holding the revolver with all the power behind it of a leg which used to send the pig-skin fifty yards.

The automatic flew up and struck the ceiling. There was a shriek of pain from the crook, for the kick had broken some bones in the hand. And then Hilwin fell upon him with the sure grip of a football player.

"Ouch, ouch. Let me up. You've broken my hand. Oh, my God, the pain."

Hilwin rose from his victim and picked up the pistol, which fortunately had not discharged.

"Put that money back in the bag," he commanded.

Sniveling with pain the crook tried to obey orders. Without any compunction Hilwin let him finish the job. He was breathing heavily, more from triumph than from his exertions, and he was wondering what was the next move.

"Now you listen to me," he declared to the crook. "That money belongs to me.

I intend to put over a big deal to-morrow, which explains why all this cash is in my room. There was nothing in the bag given me by the suicide except a few dirty shirts, which I threw away. I am not afraid of the police, nor you nor anybody else. I am going to keep your automatic because people who don't know how to handle such things shouldn't have them. And I am not turning you over to the police because I want to rejoin my friends and haven't time to be bothered with you. I don't care whether you believe what I tell you or not. If you ever cross my path again I won't break your hand; I'll break your neck."

"I was a fool not to shoot you on sight," grumbled the crook as he nursed his hand. "Hey, not that. You said you wouldn't." For Hilwin had taken the telephone and spoke into it: "Send up the house detective."

"I want to make sure you get out of the hotel, and I'm going to ask him to escort you out," explained Hilwin.

"Look here," declared the unsuccessful robber. "Nobody knows but me how you got this money. Give me half of it and I'll keep quiet. Otherwise I'll get it all, because I'm not through with you by any means."

Hilwin laughed with a merriment he didn't feel. "Nobody knows but you!" he exclaimed. "You haven't much sense. Why if I had stolen this money and you were the only witness, it would be the best thing in the world for me to empty this gun into you. You're a thief. I find you in my room. I struggle with you, take your gun away from you and to protect myself I have to kill you. I'd get a vote of thanks from the police."

"Yes, but you won't do it. You ain't got the guts."

"I've guts enough, but I have nothing to fear from you. So why should I commit murder?"

"Don't do it on my account," said the crook with a sour grin.

At this moment the house detective bustled in.

"This gentleman refuses to leave my room, though I don't want to see him any

more. Will you escort him out of the hotel and make sure he doesn't hang around outside?"

"Come on, kid," said the detective. "Want me to make a pinch?"

"No, just throw him out."

"This ain't no way to treat a friend," protested the crook moving toward the door with the detective. "I'll see you again when you'll be sorry you didn't do business with me."

"Good night."

As soon as he was alone Harry lost his air of confidence. He was actually very much frightened. It was bad enough to be holding on to a fortune that he wasn't really certain he owned, when he thought that nobody knew he had it. Now he had active enemies, for the crook would probably call in assistance, and he would have to look out for trouble. And the worst of it was that he couldn't ask the authorities to protect him.

He remembered that he had to rejoin the theater party at the Russian restaurant because if he didn't show up it might start them talking about him. Besides, that daughter of Simpson's was a mighty fascinating girl.

And the bag must not remain in the bedroom a minute longer.

Whether the hotel safe would accommodate anything as large as the bag, he did not know, and he was afraid to ask. But he thought of a simple hiding place. Examining the grip and discovering that the crook had not damaged the lock but opened it with a key of some sort, he locked it again and started downstairs.

When he reached the ground floor he did not pass into the street, for he figured the robber might be lurking around. Instead, he went to the basement and out through a passage leading directly into the Grand Central Station. Making sure he wasn't followed, he stepped up to the package-room window and checked the bag. In a place where so much baggage was being handled he felt sure the clerks were too busy and probably too honest to go through anything so ordinary looking as his hand bag. And he felt it would be the last place in the world a crook would think of looking.

After which he jumped into a taxicab and sought the restaurant where he expected to meet his new friends.

CHAPTER III.

TWO KINDS OF GIRLS.

THIS restaurant was one of the new intimate clubs which happen to have caught the fancy of New York society. With only twenty-five or thirty tables, the effect was something like a big private party. Very high prices kept the clientele fairly select and the guests felt at liberty to let themselves go rather more than they would do in a large hotel café.

Harry caught his friends as they were checking their garments and concealing their drinkables in side and hip pockets. A general shout went up at his appearance. One might think he had been a member of the crowd for years. Ruth Simpson seized his right arm and another girl his left and both scolded him tenderly for daring to absent himself, "even for a few minutes."

Hilwin smiled rather grimly when he thought of all that had happened in those few minutes, but he had sense enough to keep the cause of his mirth to himself. Shortly he was whirling about in a dance with the Simpson girl, rather bothered by the abandon with which the society girls gave themselves up to the raptures of jazz. Miss Simpson impressed herself upon him in a manner which would have caused interference by the floor director at one of the dancing parties in Jersey City. And yet he knew perfectly well that if he took the slightest liberty he would suffer a complete social eclipse.

Back at the table he found a new couple. Miss Mildred Duroy, the well known musical comedy singer, had been plucked at the stage door and brought to the party. Miss Duroy sat next to Hilwin and was soon confidential with him. Her partner busied himself with Ruth Simpson.

"Yes, it's a rotten show," said Miss Duroy. "I don't think it will last another couple of weeks. It's the most curious thing that pieces like this get a chance while really good shows can't find a producer."

"How do you know they are good shows if they are not produced?" demanded Bill Cromwell, listening in for a second or two.

"Any simp can tell a real score and a good book," replied Miss Duroy. "Now I know a piece, which was really written for me. It has a musical score which would knock Broadway cold and one of the cleverest librettos ever turned out. The piece is fairly inexpensive, too. Forty thousand dollars would put it on, and twenty has already been raised. The other twenty can't be found, so there goes that."

"Is there much money in a successful musical comedy?" asked Hilwin innocently.

"Is there money?" shrilled Miss Duroy. "Where were you raised? Why, a successful musical show can make five thousand dollars a week. Jim Montgomery made a million out of 'Irene' and look at what George M. Cohan cleaned up in 'Little Nellie Kelly.'"

"You mean to say there is a chance of making a few hundred thousand for an investment of twenty thousand or so."

"Sure," declared Cromwell, and you can win thirty-six thousand to one in roulette if you pick the lucky number."

"Be still," interposed Miss Duroy sharply. "It's not the same at all. If you have a good show you can't lose, and this is a good show. Can I interest you in it, Mr. Hilwin?"

"I am interested," he declared seriously.

At this a hoot went up around the table. The men looked at Hilwin with mingled respect and pity; respect that he might have twenty thousand dollars and pity that he might be induced to risk it on a musical show. The girls gazed at him with the interest that any woman exhibits when a man who is young and good looking is suddenly discovered to have money to throw away.

"Miss Duroy has monopolized you long enough," declared Ruth, turning her back on the man to whom she had been talking. "Come and dance."

"My angel! You wouldn't take away my angel!" exclaimed the actress, throwing her arms around Hilwin's neck.

"I'll say she won't," announced the man Miss Simpson had deserted. "She promised this dance to me."

He promptly dragged Ruth to her feet, and the others also scrambled out upon the floor. Miss Duroy turned her big black orbs full upon Hilwin and let loose her most fascinating smile.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if *you* were to make it possible for my show to be produced. Financiers of plays are usually the most impossible people, but you would be different.

"What fine times we could have together! What a success we would have! How much money we would make, because I don't mind telling you I am to have a percentage in the piece."

Hilwin was a simple youngster, though not so simple as he had been a few days before. He sensed the insincerity and the artifice of the beautiful woman who was attempting to beguile him. He realized fully he was being vamped. He much preferred Ruth Simpson, boisterous flapper as she was, to this sleek and perfumed creature.

But he was a person with a bagful of money and that money was at present drawing no interest and running frightful risks in the checkroom of the Grand Central Station.

And he had been struck by an idea. If he were able to put some of that money into an enterprise which would return him huge sums on the investment in a short period of time, he could turn the original amount intact over to the rightful owner if that individual ever showed up.

"Let me hear the music and read the book," he informed Miss Duroy, "and if I like it I'll make an investment."

"Oh, you adorable person," she exclaimed, and she kissed him full on the mouth. The people at the next table grinned and clapped their hands, but Ruth Simpson, dancing by with her partner, gave Miss Duroy a furious glance.

"That's enough," she declared. "I've got to save Harry Hilwin from that nasty vamp."

"Cut out the spooning, Harry, and dance with me," she demanded, and Harry had nothing to do but obey. The vamp lady grinned maliciously at Ruth. She had finished her business deal.

"You're not going to be idiot enough to put money into a musical comedy for that woman?" asked Miss Simpson with more indignation than she was justified in expressing to a man she had met for the first time only a few hours before.

"Not for that woman. I don't care an awful lot for her," said Harry. "But I have some loose change and a flyer in a musical comedy sounds interesting, especially if the financial returns are as big as they say."

"I know a man who lost all his money backing a musical comedy, and I don't want you to have the same experience. If you have money to put to work my father could invest it for you in the cotton business, which is a lot safer."

"Yes, but it takes a long time to get a return in that business. I'm looking for a quick turnover."

"I believe you're completely fascinated by the woman. She isn't any good. She can't sing and she can't dance. All she does is vamp men into putting money into productions for her. I'm disappointed in you. And if you could see where her lipstick came off on your cheek." She laughed meanly, as he tried to wipe it off with the back of his hand.

Harry didn't get another chance with Ruth during the remainder of the dancing. Other men claimed her and he danced with other girls, particularly with Miss Duroy, who had evidently informed her escort that there were business reasons why he must permit her to devote herself to Hilwin. The men attempted to chaff Harry on the "angel" business, but Miss Duroy was so much in earnest that they realized they had better not interfere.

"When shall I see you—to-morrow?" she asked Hilwin.

"Whenever you say."

"Come to my apartment at the Giltmore at two o'clock. We'll have a little time alone and then I'll have you meet the author and the composer and the man who intends to produce the show."

"It's a date."

As the party went into the street Ruth Simpson got a chance to say to Harry: "Come and see me any time. Better 'phone

Madison 02224. You'll remember the number."

"If I forget everything else I'll remember."

"Better forget that vamp's musical comedy."

Hilwin laughed and waved his hand as the taxis drove away.

At two the next afternoon he inquired for Miss Duroy at the Giltmore. That lady who was still in bed gave a gurgle of excitement when he was announced. She had experience with angels. Many a man who was willing to sprout theatrical wings at one A. M. changed his mind and decided to stay on earth in the cold gray morning.

"Don't let him get away," she said to the clerk. "Send him right up. I need him in my business."

"Quit your kidding, Miss Duroy," laughed the clerk as he hung up. "The lady is expecting you," he explained to Hilwin. "You are to go up to her suite, 504."

Miss Duroy was jiggling her telephone receiver excitedly.

"Give me Bryant 02289 quick. Hello. Mr. Rubenstein, please. Is that you, Jake? All right. This is Millie. Hop into a taxi right away. Put the script of 'Sweetheart Annie' in your pocket. And try to get Bill Delaney with his music. I've hooked a live one. Honest, this time there's something doing. I won't let him get away if I have to dance the 'hooch a ma cooch' for him."

After this she passed into her bathroom and made a swift but efficient toilet. Then wrapping around her a negligée so beautiful and expensive that it would have fed a family of children for five years, and slipping her bare feet into golden mules, she emerged into her sitting room where Harry had just been ushered by her maid.

Seen in the daylight Mildred Duroy wasn't quite so exquisite as she appeared in the candle lights of the Petroushka. But she was still under thirty years old, her eyes and teeth were excellent, her hair was her own and voluminous, and she boasted one of the most perfect figures in the show business, a figure which the negligée did not entirely conceal.

"Oh, you dear man," she greeted him. Crossing the room in a few jumps, she treated him to a warm embrace.

He did not exactly suffer under this treatment, but it made him a little uncomfortable.

"Now look here, Miss Duroy," he began, when she had released him and he had collapsed into a big armchair a few feet away. "I like you, and all that, but I'm not here to talk business because I've fallen in love with you. If this is a good show and the prospects are good I'm interested. If not, I'm not. And while I wouldn't want a better vamp than you if I wanted to be vamped, I'm only interested in the business side of the affair. You don't have to be nice to me to make me buy into a really good show."

"Oh, but Harry," she exclaimed with a pout. "It isn't that at all. Long before we talked about the show last night I was interested in you. I thought you were the best looking fellow there and I gave the chap who brought me the shake."

"Well, I like you too, but this is business."

"And don't you love me a teeny weeny bit?" she asked drawing her chair toward him.

"I guess I love you about as much as you love me. And I wish you'd get dressed. Suppose somebody came in and caught us."

"You're an idiot," snapped Miss Duroy, expressing her true opinion for once. "The people coming are friends of mine. However, if it will make you feel better I'll finish my toilet. You'll find a copy of 'Our Dumb Animals' to read."

"Where?" asked Hilwin innocently.

"Ye gods," remarked Miss Duroy, and vanished into her bedroom.

"Guess I'm being kidded," grinned Hilwin. "I hope the manager and the author won't kiss me when they come in."

Five minutes after she had entered her bedroom her 'phone tinkled again. It was Mr. Rubenstein.

"Come to my bedroom door, Jake. I want to see you before I introduce you to the angel," she said in a low voice.

When Jake arrived, accompanied by Mr.

Delaney, they were welcomed in her sanctuary. Jake was a short, stout, bald-headed and very greasy looking person. Delaney, the pianist, was tall, red-headed and had protruding teeth.

"What's the big idea, Millie?"

"You got 'Sweetheart Annie?'"

"Say, old girl, my option on that expired yesterday. I think Dillingham's going to do it."

"Oh, my God."

"Can the hysterics. I brought another just as good."

"What's the name of it?"

"I dunno. What's its name, Bill?"

"'Queen o' my Heart.'"

"It's a good title," nodded Jake.

"Is it any good?"

"How do I know. I ain't read it. Good as any of them. It was on top of the pile."

"The score ain't so bad," said Bill "I looked it over in the taxicab."

"You poor fish," hissed Miss Duroy. "Here I find a man with twenty thousand dollars to put on a show, and you ain't even got a show."

"Who ain't got a show?" demanded Rubenstein indignantly. "If he's got twenty thousand we've got a show."

"But 'Sweetheart Annie' had a big part for me."

"So has this. A corker."

"How do you know; you haven't read it."

"Millie, I don't have to read them. What's a musical show, anyway? A bum plot, a lot of vaudeville acts, a flock of janes and all the gold and silver scenery you've got cash enough to pervide. If this sucker has the coin, the title rôle's yours."

"But suppose he doesn't like it?"

"You read it to him and make him like it."

"And the music?"

"Leave that to Bill. This guy is going to hear the best tunes from all the popular successes. Bill knows how to fix 'em up. And while Bill's playin' you'll be holdin' his hand and I'll be looking out the window."

"I'm not so sure that'll work. This fellow isn't so terrible crazy about me."

"Then how did you get him to put up the jack?"

"I think he wants to do it for an investment."

"An investment! Oh, Lord!"

"Holy Moses!"

Both Bill and Jake went into hysterics about this, but Millie held up a warning hand. "Look out. He'll hear you. Now go out and come in the sitting room door."

Meanwhile Harry Hilwin had been idly looking out of the window. That morning he had redeemed his bag of money from the railroad package room; boldly rented a good-sized safety deposit box at one of the banks where he had opened an account and placed his greenbacks at last in a place of absolute security. He had withheld enough to double his balance in the two banks, and he still carried in his clothes an amount which would justify any yegg in murdering him.

When Jake and Bill had been introduced to him by Millie, he dispensed with their program in a manner which flabbergasted them.

"I understand you gentlemen own a musical comedy and will sell me a half interest for twenty thousand dollars."

"You bet," declared Jake. "And after you have heard it you're going to say it's the best show of its kind you ever listened to."

"You are a producer, Mr. Rubenstein?"

"Yep. I've produced some of the greatest things Broadway ever saw! Remember 'The Lady in Velvet'?"

"No."

"Well, that one didn't run very long, but it was a great show. Remember 'The Merry Widow'?"

"Did you produce that?"

"Surest thing you know. Of course, Savage got the credit, but I did the work."

"And this gentleman is the composer?"

"Well, no. This gentleman is the musical director of all my enterprises." Millie almost strangled trying to keep from laughing, while Bill, himself, accepted his honors with an air of mild surprise.

"Bill, tickle the piano, and let the gent hear some of the tunes."

Hilwin held up his hand. "It won't be necessary. I am sure you would not have picked out a bad show and I know so little about music that I wouldn't appreciate a lot of tunes I never heard before. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll buy a half interest in this show. You put it on. Pick the best cast you can get. I haven't anybody in mind."

"Oh, Harry—" exclaimed Millie. "You know that I am to have the leading rôle."

"Miss Duroy, of course. You'll find something for her."

"The leading rôle, Harry."

"If Mr. Rubenstein considers you suited to it. The only condition I make is that my name shall not be associated with it in any way. I'm not looking for publicity, and if I get any I'll cancel all arrangements. I don't want to be known as interested. I have good reasons. Is that clear, Mr. Rubenstein?"

"Well, sure. Just as you say. Only money talks, you know."

Hilwin took out his fat wallet and drew two five hundred dollar bills from it. "Here's a deposit to show my good faith," he said.

Rubenstein's eyes sparkled as he picked up the notes.

"Say, Mr. Hilwin, you're the kind of man I like to do business with. I'll keep your connection as quiet as the grave. But don't you want to be in on picking the chorus, and the principals?"

"I may attend the rehearsals as a friend of Miss Duroy's, but I don't want anything to do with the cast. I wouldn't know a good chorus girl from a bad one."

"Cinch," grinned Bill. "There ain't no good ones."

"Can that stuff," exclaimed Millie. "I was once a chorus girl myself."

Bill laughed out loud but checked the mirth at a baleful glare from Rubenstein.

"You have the proper legal papers ready to-morrow and I'll meet you at your office with a lawyer," said Hilwin. "I'll pay the balance in cash then. Now, Miss Duroy, please excuse me, and accept my thanks for bringing me in touch with these gentlemen."

Hilwin shook hands all around and departed, leaving three vastly puzzled theatrical people.

CHAPTER IV.

A MUSICAL INVESTMENT.

"WHAT'S the matter with that bird?" demanded Bill. "He buys half a show he hasn't heard, from a guy who don't own it, for a dame he ain't stuck on, and he doesn't want to lamp the candidates for the chorus. He's a nut."

"This is good money," replied Rubenstein, fondling the notes.

"If the rest is good I should worry what his game is. Find out where the author and composer of this show hang out and sign them up right away. Then get a lawyer and form a corporation so he'll have preliminary papers ready to-morrow."

"Can you produce the show on \$20,000?" asked Millie.

"With \$20,000 cash I can easily dig up \$10,000 more. Money draws money. An eight girl chorus and two sets. I know where there are a lot of good costumes just in from a show that blew up on its road try-out. Sure, we can produce it."

"You ain't actually going to put the show on?" Bill was incredulous.

"What's your idea? Graft the dough and give him nothing? I'm afraid of that guy. There's something behind him. He ain't such a fool. As a matter fact that's the way to buy a musical show. The ones you think are good fliv. The lemons turn out to be pippins. Supposing we succeeded in cheating him out of half his \$20,000, we'd have \$10,000 wouldn't we? On the other hand, supposing we put on a show and it's a hit. We have a third interest anyway, after we've dug up a little more dough. Well, we've got a chance to make a hundred thousand. You bet you're life I'm going to produce this show and it's going to be the best thing I ever did."

"Ain't sayin' much," from Bill.

"Shut up. Now, Millie, I don't know about you for the lead." He looked at her searchingly. "You ain't as young as you was, and your pipes are losing their steam."

"Is that so?" Millie's eyes narrowed dangerously. "Well, my pipes are strong enough to bust this deal wide open unless you sit right down here and sign an agreement that I play the lead and have my name in the electric lights."

"This guy ain't crazy about you at all."

"I led him in and I can lead him out. He's a bit shy and didn't want you to think it was because of me he was putting up the jack. And anyway I can give him such an earful about you and your career that he'll back away so fast you can't see him with a spyglass. You put on the 'Merry Widow,' but Savage got the credit. All you had to do with the 'Merry Widow' was selling tickets on the sidewalk."

"I didn't say you couldn't have the lead," retorted Jake hastily. "I suppose he'd insist on it, though he didn't say so. And after all you tipped us to this."

"For which I get one of those \$500 bills."

"Ah, no, Millie. This is on the level. All the jack has to go into the show. No commissions. This fellow's lawyer will sew us up tight."

"All right. But you sign the agreement about me playing the lead." Seizing a pen she wrote rapidly, and Jake signed.

Quite unaware that his absurd business methods had caused a crooked manager to decide that honesty was the best policy, Hilwin arrived at the Mastodon in a taxi. His hasty departure from the Giltmore had been due to a quickening desire to call up Ruth Simpson.

He was human enough to feel a thrill of excitement at the idea of calling upon a well-known actress at her apartment, but he was still conventional enough in his point of view to be a bit shocked at Millie's obvious willingness to go to great lengths with a man who would finance her show, and there was a wholesomeness about Ruth, despite her flapperish pertness, which contrasted most favorably with the sleek and rather snaky prima donna.

Then why did he agree to buy in on the show, you might ask? Because he was just a gambler, making a blind wager. He realized that even after he had heard the script and listened to the score he would be ut-

terly unable to tell whether the piece were good, bad or indifferent. So he just purchased a pig in a bag. And incidentally saved a couple of hours' time which could be profitably used, trying to get in touch with Ruth.

Miss Simpson was at home and easily induced to go to the telephone. Talking over the 'phone was one of her chief diversions. The conversation went something like this:

"Miss Simpson, this is Mr. Hilwin."

"Mr. Hilwin?" with a rising inflection.

"Why—er—yes. I met you last night."

"The party was quite large, last night. Which were you, Mr. Hilwin?"

"Why—er—I was the chap joining you at the Mastodon, who went to Princeton with Bill Cromwell. Surely you remember me now?"

"Oh, yes. I wasn't sure your name was Mr. Hilwin. You were short and dark."

"No, I'm tall and fair." Harry, by this time was overcome with confusion and humiliation.

"Oh, yes. I think I danced with you once, didn't I?"

"If I made such a slight impression on you that you don't remember how I looked, I must apologize for presuming to call you to the 'phone. Good-by Miss Simpson."

"Harry."

"Yes." It's impossible to describe the change in his tone at hearing her use his first name.

"Don't be an idiot. Of course, I remember you, but I owed you something for falling for that nasty actress woman."

"Gee, Miss Simpson, you certainly made me feel small. I thought you'd forgotten me completely."

"You deserve it, but I didn't exactly. You are too nice a boy to be lured into backing a show for a person like that. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Calling you up."

"Well, I'm not very busy myself and I might be induced to come to have tea with you, if you urged very hard."

"When can you come?"

"Soon as I can get my hat on. Mastodon?"

"I'll be waiting."

Harry, radiant, stepped out of the 'phone

booth. A thin, dark foreign-looking man scrutinized him carefully but he did not notice him.

The dark man stepped to the telephone operator as Harry hastened away.

"Was that Mr. Hilwin?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you."

Now to go back a little. We left the rat-faced young man being escorted out of the hotel by the house detectives, the night before. That individual hastened to a doctor of his acquaintance and discovered that a small bone was broken in his hand. It was neatly bandaged by the physician and he went on his way.

"How did you get the busted wing, Moriatty?" the doctor had demanded.

"Kicked by a mule," he had replied, and mumbled to himself. "And that's no lie."

Mr. Moriatty did a little thinking during the remainder of the night and decided that the prize was worth calling in more competent workers than he had proved to be himself. So next morning he rang the bell in a certain house in the Fifties and was admitted to the presence of a heavy set man who looked like a former saloon proprietor, which is exactly what he was—among other things.

"Hello, Moriatty," the big man greeted him. "What's on your mind this fine day?"

"If I put you next to something worth \$200,000 in cash, what will my share be?"

"Depends on who has to do the work. If it's easy you get a third. If it's very hard you don't get so much."

"Well, I can't swing it alone, so I'll have to take what you give me."

"That's a wise kid. Now spring your story."

"In the first place have you heard of any big haul being made lately of between \$150,000 and \$200,000 worth of nice new greenbacks?"

"Not around here. Wait till I call headquarters and find out what they know down there. Hand me that 'phone, will ye?"

"Hello, police headquarters? Give me Detective Sergeant Leatrice." A moment's pause. "That you, Phil. Bull Hansen talking. Private and confidential. I want

to know who's got away from anywhere with anything up to a quarter of a million. Never mind the small stuff. What do I want to know for? You get me the dope I'm looking for and there may be something doing for you. Call me back."

He hung up and folded his big flabby white hands across his stomach regarding Moriatty keenly out of red-rimmed eyes.

"'Bout a week ago I was on a North River ferry early in the morning when a feller jumped overboard."

"Heard about that. Body not recovered. Nothing known about him."

"Just before he went over the rail he said something to a man named Hilwin who was standing alongside of him. I heard them talking but didn't pay any attention. When the crowd rushed to the rail to watch the search for the body I got busy and landed a few wallets and a watch. Nothing much in them. As I was slipping off the ferryboat on the New York side this fellow Hilwin passed me carrying a bag. Now it happened I had noticed him getting on the boat, because he is one of that kind of guys you pay attention to somehow, and he didn't have a bag. I didn't think anything about it because I saw a bull eying me pretty hard, and with the stuff in my clothes, I had to make a quick getaway.

"This fellow Hilwin looked to me like a regular Jersey commuter, probably hauling down twenty or thirty a week in one of the big buildings. I didn't think any more about him till last night when I slid into the Mastodon, and who was sitting alongside of me but him, dressed up in a suit of evening clothes.

"I get talking to him sort of casual, and all at once it flashes over me that the bag he carried off the ferry must have belonged to the suicide and there might have been something worth while in it.

"So I says: 'What was in the bag?'"

"He almost fell out of his chair and by the way he tried to cover up I knew I'd struck something live.

"He admitted, though, he pinched the suicide's bag, and said there was nothing in it but some dirty clothes. But here he was living at the Mastodon, spending right and left, and where did he get it?

"Just then a lot of society folks came along and knew him. Old college chum stuff. They took him away with them to be gone all night, dinner, theater, supper.

"Just as a matter of precaution, though I didn't expect to find anything, I waited a couple of hours and slipped into his room. I opened a trunk and found a bag in it. I opened the bag, and it's chock-a-block full of bank notes.

"If I'd beaten it right away everything would be all right, but I couldn't walk out of the hotel with a bag without questions, so I figured on counting the cash and tucking it away all over me. I'm about up to a hundred thousand when in blows Hilwin. Like a boob I'd forgot to lock the door."

"Boob is putting it mild," complimented Hansen.

"I cover him with my little automatic, but there's a lot I want to know about the money, and all of a sudden he kicks the gun out of my hand, busting the hand."

"Ought to have busted your head. Picking pockets is about your limit, Moriarty, so it's just as well you turned over this deal to me."

"All right. I know I pulled a bone, but don't rub it in. What can we do now?"

"Find out who the money belongs to. Once we know we can shake this feller down."

"But supposing we can't find out."

"You don't suppose a couple of hundred thousand is kicking around without an owner? This man who jumped off the boat stole the money from somebody. If he was honest and it belonged to him he wouldn't have jumped, would he? Would you commit suicide with a quarter of a million unspent in your traveling bag? Course not.

"This crook just lost his nerve. That proves he was an amateur. Most probably some bank cashier. You say it was in small bills?"

"Twenties, nearly all of it."

"Hard to trace. He wasn't such a sap when he started. This remorse is hell. Answer the 'phone, will you?"

Moriarty obediently picked up the telephone. "Wants you."

Hansen reached for it. "That you sergeant? What luck!"

He listened for a couple of minutes to a recital of crimes from the other end.

"Thank you, sergeant. You'll hear from me soon.

"Nothing resembling this reported from anywhere. There's been time enough, too, if this fellow Hilwin has been sporting round for three or four days. It's kind of queer."

"What's to be done?"

"Get a line on Hilwin. Find out what he did before he grabbed the bag. Find out where he worked, and where he lived. Learn what story he told to explain the change in his condition. Be very careful, though, not to tip anyone off about him. We don't want anybody butting in on this case but us."

"Hunting for a needle in a haystack, trying to trace a guy in New York."

"You poor fish, he's probably in the city directory. If he's been working in New York a year he's there. And if he isn't you'll find him in the Jersey City directory. If there are a dozen Harry Hilwins look them all up."

"Supposing you do find out all about him. What good will it do?"

Hansen lost his patience. "Go do what I tell you and don't bother me with questions. I know what I'm about."

"Oh, all right," grumbled Moriarty, picking up his hat. "I'll see you this afternoon and spill what I get."

After he had gone Hansen called up the Sun Detective Agency, and getting his connection talked with the manager.

"That you, Jim? I want a good smooth operator put on the trail of Harry Hilwin, Hotel Mastodon. No, he ain't done anything, but a friend of mine's jealous of his wife and wants to know what this fellow's doing all the time. Don't do anything but keep tabs on him. I want to know who he sees and what he does every hour of the twenty-four. All right, put two operators on him, if you have to, but don't fall down on it."

After he had hung up Mr. Hansen opened a box of cigars, picked a good one, bit off the end, spat it out viciously, lit up and leaned back in his chair with an air of complete satisfaction.

Blissfully unaware that a couple of private detectives were devoting their working hours to him, Harry Hilwin puffed peacefully upon an expensive cigar and waited for Ruth. She came, a sweet and demure vision in a gray costume, and so different was she from the befurred and befluffed damsel of the night before that she had to smile at him to be recognized.

"I had the hardest time getting here. Three of the girls tried to pull me to the Plaza with them, and a man friend of mine overtook me on the Avenue in his car and put up the most persistent argument that I should go for a ride with him."

"I'm flattered."

"You'd better be. Let's get our tea. I'm growing to be a regular English girl with my tea at four o'clock. It's funny how you get into a habit, isn't it?"

"I hope you'll get the habit of having tea with me."

"How well you work," said Ruth with mock admiration. Chattering thus they passed into the tea room. Figuring they were safe for an hour, the dark, foreign-looking man went away on a little business.

"How is it you have time to take girls to tea in the afternoon. Aren't you in business?" she demanded when they had settled themselves comfortably.

"Why—er, I'm not doing anything just at present," Harry explained in some embarrassment. "I've got a couple of deals on that may keep me pretty busy soon, but I hope I can always find time to do things with you."

"What is your business when you are working at it?" she asked with true female inquisitiveness.

"I'm what you might call a promoter. I sort of give things a push and get them going." He was thinking of his play venture of the early afternoon.

"You must come to the house and meet father. He is the dearest thing. Let's me do anything I like. Never interferes, but a regular playmate when I want him to be."

Harry thought of the cold, sardonic, exacting old slave driver who had pitched him out so unceremoniously, and tried to fit him into the picture painted by his daughter. But he couldn't. It was too much.

The conversation became more intimate. Ruth was obviously interested in Hilwin. Actually he was the first man who had seriously attracted her in her three seasons of dinners and dances. He felt her sweetness and her charm, and he did not try to deceive himself that he was not rapidly falling in love with her. Under normal conditions he would have let himself go.

But who could tell what was going to happen to him in the next few weeks or months. If he should meet her father, how quickly the old man would send him about his business, if he did not advise the police to find out where he got the money he was spending. While Ruth was deciding to herself that she would see a lot of Hilwin, he was endeavoring to steel himself against ever seeing her again. With the result that he agreed to join a group for dinner and theater next night, he to call for her at her home. And that's the way they left things.

The foreign-looking operator had been back at his post for an hour before Harry brought Ruth out and placed her in a taxi-cab. Jake, Bill and Millie had been waiting for him for half an hour when he arrived at the meeting place next day, accompanied by a lawyer recommended to him by Bill Cromwell. All the way up in the taxi, the lawyer, Tom Evans, a friendly and intelligent young chap, had been trying to dissuade Harry from the theatrical venture. If he had been able to listen in on the conversation in Jake's office before their arrival he would have tried harder.

"It's this way," Jake was explaining. "After I left your flat, Millie, I got to figuring out that we'd better get the best script and best score we could find for this show, since we have a chance to clean up ourselves on it. Now this 'Queen of My Heart' is a bunch of junk, and the score ain't so good. Bill played it over. So we hunted around and found a piece that's a lot better."

"You ain't even going to give the poor gink the show he bought?" scoffed Millie.

"We're going to give ourselves a run for our money. This fellow who wrote 'Queen of My Heart' wanted regular royalties, but we found an author who'd take half the

usual, give us the other half and waive his royalties entirely for four weeks."

"What good is that if the show is rotten?"

"It ain't so rotten," offered Bill. "Score's better than the other one. Book needs a little jazzing, but we can do it."

"And the leading rôle; how about that?"

"Oh, it's yours, kid. Don't worry."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the angel. As Harry had not heard the name of the piece he had purchased the day before he was quite unaware of the shift, and his lawyer, who was prepared for ordinary traps did not dream that his principal was so utterly careless as not to know what he had bought.

Accordingly the contracts were quickly drawn, providing that one-half interest in a musical comedy called "Lovely Laura" was sold to Henry Hilwin for \$20,000 by Jacob Rubenstein, who bound himself to produce the piece, do whatever other financing might be necessary and draw no salary for his labor.

From a legal standpoint the contract was fair enough. Jake knew of a lot of ways of getting around it, but for once that gentleman felt inclined to be reasonably on the level. Harry was luckier than he realized in that respect.

When the papers had been signed Millie hastened to appropriate the angel. "Let's go have tea, dear, and we can talk about the play."

"Don't want to talk about it," replied Hilwin. "Mr. Rubenstein, how long will it take you to produce this?"

"Oh, about two or three weeks to cast it, five weeks' rehearsals and open in New York after two or three nights out of town to knock it into shape."

"It will be two months before you can open?"

"Don't see how it can be done any quicker."

"Well, don't delay any more than is necessary."

"What's your hurry, dear?" demanded Millie, playfully squeezing his hand as it lay on the table.

"Oh, just anxious to see what's going to happen."

Inwardly he was saying. "Two months! Where will I be in two months, and will they let me out of jail to see the first performance?"

"Dinner, to-night?" asked Millie tenderly.

"Sorry, but I've got a dinner and theater engagement."

"To-morrow night?"

"Maybe. I'll call you up."

CHAPTER V.

A DIFFICULT BIRD TO HANDLE.

WHEN Hilwin had departed with his lawyer, Jake looked after him, and shook his head in perplexity.

"He beats me. This cash is the best in the world, but what's he trying to get out of it? Makes you the prima donna and ducks dates with you. Trusts me with the whole sheebang, and don't even want to watch me work. Ain't heard the words and music yet and don't seem to want to. Well, all I hope is we get the show on before the lunatic asylum finds out he got away."

"If he escaped from an asylum, he's the best heeled lunatic I ever heard of," commented Bill. "I think he's deeper than we suspect. Watch your step, Jake."

"I'm in this thing to hand Broadway a wow. I'll think about gypping him out of his share if it's a hit, maybe, though I always said if a guy was square with me I'd be square with him."

"Huh?" grunted Millie. "If he makes an honest man out of you he'll do more than the Lord did."

Millie had two sides to her; a bitter, cynical one, developed by her tenement house origin and her experiences in vaudeville and musical comedy; and a society veneer which went well with strangers.

Howland's lawyer had been much impressed by her.

"Some girl, that Miss Duroy. She seems quite taken with you," he remarked to Hilwin. "If she ever asked me to make a date with her I wouldn't turn her down, you can bet."

"Pooh," sniffed Harry. "She's just be-

ing nice to me because I'm buying in on the show and she's to be leading woman. She doesn't fool me."

"Somebody's fooling you, or you wouldn't be in it at all."

"Nobody's fooling me," said Harry a little testily. "You must admit that a lot of money is made in the show business."

"Yes by those who know."

"Not always. Lots of boobs like myself have bought in on pieces put on by professional showmen and made a lot out of it. I know I'm taking a chance, but no more than in any other business."

"You think so? I know how you could have invested that \$20,000 and made a sure profit of five or ten thousand in a very short time. The odds are ten to one against you ever getting anything out of 'Lovely Laura'."

"What's in a name?" quoted Hilwin airily. "But look here, Evans, what's your proposition. I've got some more money."

Evans looked at him in amazement.

"Are you serious?"

"Sure."

"Well, I'll tell you. Next door to me is a real estate concern and you know the money that is made in real estate."

"I don't; but go on."

"These fellows, Brown and Harlow, have taken a tract of land about twenty-five miles out and are developing it for homesteads. Easy commuting distance, good service. It's a country village that has been jumped by the real estaters up to this time, but it's all right. I've bought a lot myself. Got a girl picked out and pretty soon I'm going to build a little home out there."

"The lots are going like hot cakes. The idea is to buy a dozen of them and hold them for a rise. If I had the money I'd do it."

"Sounds all right," agreed Hilwin. "How do you see this place?"

"Eskdale on the Hudson. Take a train from Grand Central. Three-quarters of an hour out. Harlow Homesteads is what they call the place."

"I'll go look at them to-morrow," said Hilwin, as the taxi stopped at the lawyer's building. "Thanks for the tip."

Evans looked after the retreating taxi with much the same perplexity which Rubenstein had displayed.

"How a fellow who does business like that got his money in the first place, gets me," he said to himself. "Must have found it."

He was right, but he didn't know it.

It was with considerable trepidation that Harry climbed the steps of the big house in the East Sixties early that evening and asked for Miss Simpson. He had been worried all day about a possible meeting with his ex-employer, and he had been on the point of phoning that he could not keep his appointment. He knew, however, that if he broke an appointment with Ruth at this stage of the game he would probably not get another, and he didn't quite see how he could get along without frequent meetings.

"This way, sir," said the butler. "Miss Ruth will be right down, and she wants you to wait in the library."

Hilwin walked briskly into a richly furnished room and came face to face with old man Simpson.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

EXPECTATION

STARLIGHT, Moonglow
Hoofbeats in the snow.
Lamplight, Fireglow
Footsteps at the door.
Lovelight, Heartglow
In Jim's arms once more.

Gladys Eloise Brierly.



Valor

By LAURIE YORK ERSKINE

Author of "The Confidence Man," "The Laughing Rider," etc.

DAVID PARMELEE, eighteen, is at spiritual odds with the harsh world of the cattle range to which he has been born. Bartholomew Parmelee, cattle baron, scorns his son for his opposition to the righting of wrongs with a six-shooter, and the rigors of Judge Lynch's "court." David bows his head to the paternal storm, but in his heart he is unafraid. Madge Hendry, daughter of an adjoining rancher, gives David a bull terrier pup, this breed being a symbol of courage. Old Man Parmelee orders his men to run down and hang Harper Preest, a cattle rustler, against the protest of David. As a further chastisement of the spirit, the father commands his son to trim the terrier's ears with a pair of shears. David defeats this decree, his opposition so inflaming the older man's rage that he suffers a slight stroke. Then, in company with Aleck Sheffield, his loyal friend, David rides into the night to prevent the hanging of the captive rustler.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MAN-KILLER UNMASKS.

DAVID had cast off his wide brimmed hat so that the moonlight which streamed upon him took from his face the golden brown tint that covered but did not hide the red flush of his cheeks. Now his face was shining in a silver glow, and his smooth cheeks, his curved lips, his curling black hair gave him the aspect of shining boyhood. But it was a boy whose dark eyes burned with an intolerable spirit,

and it was his eyes rather than the gun in his hand that held the men transfixed.

"It's all off, Dasent!" His voice rang clear in the night, and the cattlemen who heard it found that it possessed the same intangible quality of his eyes. There was a magic in them both. "Stick up your hands!" he cried.

Not a man obeyed him, and yet it did not seem that they defied him. It appeared rather as though they were held motionless by his gaze and silenced by his voice.

David walked slowly but very firmly

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 25

over to the barebacked pony and its wretched burden. He continued to face the men as he did so, and they turned, fascinated, following his movement. Reaching the drooping steed, he drew from his hip pocket a knife, and with his teeth opened it. But his eyes never left the men before him. They flashed, like questing fires, over the many faces, and not one of the men who yielded to their spell could have explained what held him motionless.

The knife opened, David shifted so that the hand which held the knife was close to the pony. Then that hand ascended, following Preest's dangling leg, finding his thigh, his waist, moving about the waist to the prisoner's hands.

"Drop that knife!" It was the harsh voice of Dasent.

David looked at him. His boy's face seemed to betray neither surprise, resentment, nor disquietude; but his eyes still burned.

"No," he said. "Preest ain't goin' to hang to-night."

Dasent glared across at him, trying to match those eyes with his gross fury.

"Drop it quick, kid!" he warned. "Yo're up against twenty guns."

"Not if I was up ag'in' a hundred!"

The knife had found its goal and the steel was cutting now at the twisted hemp.

"If you cut that rope, it's the last thing you do!" yelled Dasent. "If you was the old man himself, you couldn't stop this party!"

"It's all off!" The boy's voice rang out in a sudden burst of purpose. It struck the air with the lilt of a passionate spirit and seemed to sweep across the barren land with a sound of prophecy. "You can't stop me now!"

But his eyes had been long centered upon the livid face of Dasent, and he failed to see the quick movement of the swarthy cow-puncher nearest his elbow. That movement was a leap forward and a lithe kick, and with a cry of pain the boy saw his father's gun sail through the air, while the hand that held it went numb with pain.

Instantly a dozen hands fell to as many guns, and the group of men closed in. But

to their amazement the boy stood fast. With a lightning exertion of strength he cut through the cords which held Preest bound and threw the knife with a triumphant gesture on the ground.

"Stand back," he commanded, "an' listen to what I got to say!" Without comprehending the unleashed spirit that had so long lain suppressed in the soul of the boy, they instinctively obeyed it.

"You got me covered!" cried David. "You can shoot me to pieces! Blow orf my head! But it don't signify. I say Preest ain't goin' to hang to-night!"

"You, Dasent, you ain't the law. And my father, he ain't the law. I've cut Preest free. If you want to hang him, then shoot. You can only do it after I'm dead here in front of him!"

"Talk down, kid—he's a hawse thief!" one man called out, but he spoke rather in pity than in protest.

"Then there's a law to deal with him. Stand back!"

The boy blanched beneath his sun browned skin as Dasent moved forward, but this pallor made his face shine with a more silver glow.

"If you ain't out o' there damn quick," growled the man, "we'll shoot Preest dead."

The boy looked desperately about him. "I can't help that!" he declared. "But you got to account for him to me." And with a sudden movement he dived for his father's gun.

As he did so the swarthy cow-puncher whipped up his gun and fired at the cringing Preest, but the bullet missed wide, for preceding the explosion of that cartridge by so fine a margin as to blend its din with the same reverberation another gun was fired, and the swarthy cow-puncher staggered back, clutching a shattered arm.

From behind the cypress tree Aleck Sheffield stepped forth, and two guns glistened in his hands.

"Stick up yore hands, cowboys!" he said sharply; and this time no sense of mysticism or amazement held the old man's committee still. They yielded instantly to the practical menace of those twin muzzles and the incisive promise of that voice.

"Now hold 'em up, an' let's see you drop them guns!" quoth Aleck blithely. He paused until he was sure he had been obeyed. Then, "The kid here's ridin' herd on Preest fer a spell," he said; "an' I want he should ride away without no more shootin'."

He turned on David with apparent carelessness. "Just take yore man and pick him out a hawse," he advised. "Then ride like hell to a place you an' me know of." He seemed to ignore the others while he made sure that the boy understood him; but no man dropped his hands.

David, still holding his father's gun, still silver white from the peril that was past, gazed on his friend doubtfully.

"No more gun-play, Aleck," he said. "Just justice is all that's worth dyin' for." He took the bridle of the pony on which Preest sat, and started to lead it from the hill.

"Justice!" Dasent burst forth with an ugly laugh. "Fine talk to give to yore father's hired gunman!"

Davie swung about.

"If there's been a Parmelee on this range that's been blind to what justice means," he cried, "you can know now, Dasent, that there's a Parmelee here that's goin' to protect it."

His clear, boyish voice was all alive again, and Dasent felt an irrational discomfort before the gaze which pierced him. "An' Aleck Sheffield's my friend!" added David proudly.

"Then yore dad 'll have ter get another bodyguard!" sneered Dasent. And David, remembering the respect which each man had paid to Aleck's gun, realized for the first time why his friend had so constantly remained at his father's side. He turned to Aleck with a new light in his eyes, but that gentle humorist was intent upon the group before him.

"S' long, Dave," he drawled. "Best light out an' let these gents relax their arms. Jud Dasent, there, he's already gettin' loosed up conversationally."

"No gun-play." David spoke very crisply.

"None of my startin'," Aleck assured him. And he stood there, humorously ad-

juring his prisoners for long after David and his hostage had departed.

When he considered that time enough had elapsed to give David ample safety, he lightly slipped his guns into their separate holsters.

"It's been a nice evenin', boys," he remarked pleasantly. "But I got to go ridin'. You-all had best stay here a spell, 'cause I shore like to ride alone moonlight nights like this."

His voice mysteriously lost its pleasantry without seeming to change its tone. "The first gent that comes in sight of me the next half hour," he said, "is shore unfortunate and weary of this life."

And, backing away from them, he turned quickly at the hilltop and was in the saddle and away before the first man reached for his discarded weapon. They did not follow him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BITTER, BITTER SENTENCE.

WHEN Healey, the cook, and Chung Lee, who endured life as his apprentice, found Old Man Parmelee on his hands and knees in the doorway of his bedroom, they lit a lamp there, and would have carried him to the bed, but Parmelee balanced himself on his two feet and stated that he was about to dress himself and deal with the events of the night in person. Healey, fearing delirium or stark madness, protested stoutly, but the old man had his way.

Something had happened to him there in the darkness. He couldn't understand what physical aberration could have turned the world black and taken away his mind for that intolerable moment, but he convinced himself that it could be nothing serious, and proved his triumph over it by standing erect while his body cried out for bed, and donning his clothes while a nameless fear obsessed his unconscious mind. For a strange elation possessed him. His heart was full to bursting with the satisfaction that surged in with the realization that David had accepted his challenge.

Fully dressed, he rocked unceasingly in

the chair before the fireplace, and clenched his teeth tightly so that the tumultuous emotion in his heart would not spill out in soliloquy. There was no doubt in his mind as he recalled the boy's furtive visit to his room, and the purloined gun, that David had sallied forth to deputize for him in the hanging of Harper Preest; and he rocked his stricken body in impatience as he waited for news of that event.

In spite of the stroke that had befallen him in the darkness, in spite of a sickness which filled him with that subtle, inadmissible uneasiness for the future, he was upheld by the elation he felt in the knowledge that David had pledged himself to the life of what Bartholomew Parmelee conceived to be a man. So when Dasent and his frustrated cortege came cantering to the ranch in the pallid morning they found him gray faced and gaunt in his chair, but they found, as well, that his face was illumined with a smile.

He almost arose in his eagerness as Dasent and Tansey entered the ranch house with their resentment bubbling at their lips.

"Where is he?" Old Man Parmelee's voice was exuberant in anticipation. "Where's the boy?" he demanded. It appeared almost as if he were ready to take his son into his arms.

Dasent stared at him, amazed.

"Rode all to hell!" he snapped "An' Preest with him. What's yore game, anyway?"

It was interesting to see the effect of that speech upon old Parmelee. It was interesting to see how his eyes narrowed, how his teeth set, and the muscles of his face tightened, bulging under the skin of reddish gray. It was an exhibition of perfect control, for the man's iron nerve had well-nigh snapped under this brutal revelation that his dream was dust; that something had gone wrong.

"Talk sense!" he rasped coldly. "Where is David?"

Dasent examined the autocrat in perplexity. His amber, black flecked eyes smoldered upon the old man. They seemed to be always watching, as the eyes of a leopard watch the trainer. Treacherous

eyes, they were, and now they were clouded with perplexity.

"How sh'd I know?" he protested. "He rode in all burnin' up with crazy ambition; he stuck up the party an' took Preest away with him."

"I don't believe it!" said Parmelee.

"He stuck us up!" Tansey loudly flew to the aid of his companion.

Old Man Parmelee gazed from one to the other of them savagely.

"Yo're lyin' to me, Dasent!" he gritted. "Yo're workin' between you to throw me down, an' yo're fools enough to think you can do it. Now tell me the truth of this business without any of yore lies an' yore sneakin'." His voice whipped the air like a lash. "Did Harper Preest get away from you?" he demanded.

"The kid stampeded the party," whined Dasent doggedly.

Parmelee moved in his chair like an animal in the confines of a cage too small. It was as though he were bound and strained at his bends.

"Tell me what's true!" he demanded.

"I've told you!" Dasent flung the words out angrily. "We had it all fixed to swing him orf. The kid comes in and throws a gun on us—" He paused uneasily. "Did you send him?" he asked suddenly.

"Likely I'd send him!" snarled the old man. "Yo're crazy. Or it's the kid. He never threw a gun in his life."

"But he did! He stuck up the whole party, and by God, if you want the truth, we damn near shot him full o' daylight!"

A dull flush rose under the old man's skin.

"The kid did that!" he cried out in a terrible voice, so that the two men started and were discomposed. "My son! David! He *stopped* the hangin'?"

Dasent nodded. "He took Preest orf with him," he replied.

"And where was you? What was you-all doin'? You mean to say you let a yellow livered kid take Preest out o' yore hands like that?"

Dasent frowned. "I told you how it was. We took the gun orf the kid and had him crawlin'; but Aleck Sheffield horned in an' covered their get-away."

"An' Preest got away!" It was an exclamation full of bitterness. Suddenly Parmelee straightened convulsively in his chair. "Get 'em!" he roared with extraordinary passion. "Bring in that boy to me, an' I'll snake whip him! I'll thrash the hide orf his body." At that moment Aleck Sheffield entered the room, and the old man sprang to his feet and stood quivering to greet his bodyguard. "Where is he?" he screamed. "Tell me that!"

Aleck gazed upon him with a frown.

"Yo'-all 're takin' big chances, Bart, raisin' up thataway," he drawled. "Best sit yo'self back an' don't get all stampered."

Glaring at him with unquenchable suspicion, Parmelee relaxed into his chair again.

Sheffield turned his attention to the others. "All fixed up pretty?" he said gently.

Parmelee broke in upon him, snarling with rage, his voice harsh with menace: "You double-crossed me!"

"I stood by Dave," Aleck corrected him.

"Stood by a yellow kid who didn't even have the guts to see through his spite on his own father!" the old man charged vindictively.

Aleck's eyes flashed keenly over the two informers, then turned, warm with enthusiasm, on Old Man Parmelee.

"If you'd seen him, you'd talk different," he explained softly.

"Yes, I'd talk with a rawhide whip!" spat forth Parmelee. "That's how I'd talk to him. Don't lie for him, Aleck. I know how he went in spite to humiliate me, an' how he backed down an' cringed when he found men to deal with. Oh, God, what a thing to have for a son! A dishrag!"

"Which yo're ridin' the wrong pony every time," quoth Aleck. "Dave he didn't cringe none at that party, 'less it's cringin' when a man holds back a locoed catamount with nothin' to fight with but his eyes an' his everlastin' grit!" He flung his words directly in Dasent's face. "Jud Dasent, here, bein' the catamount," he finished easily.

"You—" Dasent's resentful voice trailed off into silence as Aleck, hand on hip, smiled genially upon him.

Parmelee gazed about upon them all uneasily. In his heart was arising then the first sense of panic he had ever felt. His body was urgently insisting to his mind that he was old, old, and that his hold upon these men was no longer strong. He was surrounded by wolves whom he had broken to the traces, and, uneasily, it was in his mind that they did not respond as usual to the crack of his whip.

"What is it, Aleck?" he cried with sudden petulance. "For God's sake, what's got into the boy. You know him. You been with him more than any other. Is he mad? What is it?"

Aleck gazed down upon him seriously.

"It's something you ain't never known about, Bart," he answered. "You've run this range like a top rider runs a rodeo. You treat men the same like they was animals. You break the bad ones, and those you can't break you kill.

"Well, this kid of yours is the first man you've met that ain't in no degree an animal. He's a man all through, and you, God help you, don't know it. You call him a woman when he shrinks from the wranglin', fightin' herd; you talk yore sneerin' insults to him when he puts in his voice against gun-play.

"But it's justice he's got in his mind. It's a clear, high-up spirit he's got in his heart that's so far above the mind of you an' me that we can't rightly understand it. But you! You talk of whippin' him for it. You talk of breakin' him like a beast to run with the rest of the herd. Shucks!

"Can a man who would take that treatment do what he did to-night? I tell you he walked into that slather of man-killin' cow-punchers like a young god walks in amongst lions! He carried yore gun in his hand. But did he use it? No! I tell you he didn't ever have any intentions of usin' it!"

"No! What then did he pack it for?" Dasent's thin voice cut into Aleck's recital with a sneer.

"I'll tell you why he packed it!" cried Aleck, turning upon him. "He told me as we rode together into a place we know of. *He packed that gun so that you would*

not feel you was up against a man without defense. He said that if you hung Preest it would be over his dead body, and if you'd shot him down his gun would never have answered back."

Parmelee glared up at the speaker without any sign of sympathy. When he spoke his words had the effect of a detached curiosity. His harsh voice held no note of compromise.

"He didn't crawl?" he asked.

"He faced that pack of coyotes with more nerve than ever I seen in my life!" Aleck's voice fell deep with the warmth of his feeling. "An' I'm here to say that nerve ain't the word. That kid stood there on the hill with the light of an angel in his eyes. He held 'em back by a spirit you an' me can't know of, an' by God, I'd have shot down my own brother himself if he'd tried to hurt him then!" His voice fell into a quieter vein.

"I was standin' by the tree, Bart, an' watchin' close; because on the ride over I'd found out that I was backin' that kid before you, or myself, or the whole tarnation world! An' when Buck Saunders threw up his gun, I shot it out of his hand; because, after seein' the kid make his stand there on the hill, I'd of shot to protect him if I'd never seen hair nor hide of him before.

"That kid of yores is a man clean through, an' he's a higher kind of man than you or me or this whole range has ever seen. If he wants to stay out in the chaparral all his days, I'm with him. If he wants to hold Preest against you, or the whole United States army, my gun's behind him!

"An' if you got half the heart an' soul in you that shines out o' his two eyes, you will be with him, too. An' what's more, you'll thank the everlastin' God that he's a son of yores!"

Old Man Parmelee had listened to this man's deep, restrained voice without abating the cold glitter of his eyes. It was his custom to keep all his argument and reason in his mind. When he spoke it was only to voice his conclusions, and he voiced them now.

"That boy," he rasped "has taken out

of my hands the power that God has given me. He's thrown my own words back into my face an' spited an' humiliated me. An' now he's won over my best man. You say that yo're takin' his side agenst me. All right.

"Go out an' tell him that I got a rawhide whip next my chair in the daytime, an' hangin' over my bed at night. When he wants to come back here, I'm goin' to take that whip and flay the hide orf him!"

The iron, unwavering monotone of his voice gave his words the ominous significance of an immutable sentence. Aleck, sensing this, looked down on him with a quality of pity in his eyes that caused Old Man Parmelee to grit his teeth in resentment.

"I'll tell him that yo're doin' as well as could be expected," said Aleck dryly, and he turned to Dasent and Tansey. "I don't want no company!" he warned them succinctly, and without further words he strode from the room.

The old man sat silent, and the others made no sound as they listened to the noise of the hoofbeats which followed Aleck's departure. The silence was broken by Parmelee. He clapped his hands down upon the arms of his chair so that they made a sudden, sharp noise in the stillness of the room.

"Get out and after them!" he shouted with a furious impetuosity. "Get them! Get Preest if you have to ride to hell for him, an' don't let nothin' stand in yore way."

Dasent sprang to his feet. He had been watching the old man narrowly throughout this strange exchange of violent emotions, and now as he spoke he seemed inspired by some subtle demon.

"You want them?" he cried feverishly. "You want them even if we have to fight?"

"I want Harper Preest if you have to kill orf a hundred men to get him!" old Parmelee roared. "Get him! That's all!"

"Dead or alive?" demanded Dasent, and he appeared to hang some mad significance upon his question.

Old Man Parmelee glared up at him as if himself on the verge of madness. "Dead

or alive!" he shrieked; and he settled himself back in his chair to grin crookedly as he heard them go.

CHAPTER X.

THE BLOODHOUND BAYS.

DASENT took the trail as a hound takes to the scent, and, like the bay-ing of a hound, his voice sounded a boisterous accompaniment to the chase. Snuff Tansey had never known the dour cattleman to give such loose rein to his tongue, and Dasent himself knew that the hot words which sprung from his lips were the voice of a passion over which he was fast losing all control.

"Sheffield will take us to him!" he cried out as they urged their tireless ponies through the darkness. "'Tain't likely he got far, 'n' we got to follow him. Follow!" He swore luridly with a laugh that was in itself a curse. "Like huntin' down a lobo," he growled, and rode for a moment in silence.

"Shucks, Jud," Tansey protested stoutly. "Ain't no manner o' sense in ridin' thisaway. It's Old Man Parmelee's dirty work. No hurry."

Dasent replied with a burst of resentful protest that seemed to be addressed rather to the air and the spangled sky than to the man beside him.

"Into the rough country, that's how they'll ride!" he snapped. "Into the foothills! There's a bunch of settlers out there. Up under the mountains. Hell!" he exploded with sudden irony. "One flash of Aleck Sheffield's gun an' they'd give everything they got. That hombre's good fer board an' lodgin' anywhere on the range without anybody takin' contracts to advertise it. That's where we got to git to. Up under the Pajarito's. But to-night. Now!" Obviously he was putting to himself an urgent question.

"Right now it would be nice for to hit the straw," grumbled Tansey; but Dasent ignored him. He seemed driven even as he drove his tired pony.

"He wouldn't try fer the hills now!" he declared. "The kid's close to the home

ranch, Tansey. He's close—he's near! Sheffield seen him before he come to the ranch. We got to trail Sheffield, an' he ain't hittin' no mountain trails. It's Sheffield we got to cover. He'll lead us to 'em. He'll take us to the kid."

His eyes roamed over the gray horizon feverishly, his face twitched, but Tansey was not convinced.

"Lots o' time. To-day we sleep—Sheffield will. Preest, he won't be able to wiggle. We'll round him up *poco tiempo*."

But the devil was in Dasent that night; a devil which Snuff Tansey was at loss to account for, as he was puzzled at the terrible parody of a smile that Dasent now turned upon him. He accompanied it with a voice low and choked with that devilish fervor.

"He said 'dead or alive!'" he snarled. "You heard him. You was there. 'Dead or alive!' That's what the old man said."

"But we ain't his cattle—we ain't his dogs! He don't own us, to make us work without sleep for him." Tansey was whipped into protest. "Let him wait!"

Dasent seemed to let the other's words smolder in his mind.

"You go back to the creek, Snuff!" he ordered suddenly. "Git yore sleep an' let the boys git theirs." He drew rein, and Tansey pulled up beside him.

"That's sense," approved Tansey.

"Go on," ordered Dasent. "Me, I'm ridin' lines on 'em. You be ready with the boys to ride by noon."

He watched Tansey canter away into the mist which preceded sunrise; then, turning his pony, he set out upon the quest which appeared to possess him like some evil spirit of medieval lore. He rode fast and far, and before the sun was high he had visited five different ranches which he suspected might shelter his quarry.

With reckless disregard for what peril must have threatened him if he had run his men to earth, he rattled doorways at midnight and hailed astonished ranchers to their windows, but he didn't find his men. When he arrived at the abandoned ranch at Bitter Creek, his pony was done, and he himself bore the pallor of a fatigue which surpassed weariness, while the devil

that showed in his eyes drew his ashen face to a dreadful tensity and upheld him against the poisons of exhaustion which weighed his body down.

He left his pony to droop in the shade of the cypress tree and charged into the bunk house to awaken the tired men with a voice that was high pitched and strained to the verge of cracking.

A strange scene followed as several of the number set about preparing a meal in the kitchen of the ranch house, which, although long abandoned as a habitation, had been often used for the ranch work of which old Parmelee made it occasionally the headquarters. It had become, as a matter of fact, an outpost of the old man's dominion, and the cow-punchers of his outfit were as familiar with it as with the buildings of their home ranch. They bustled about now, occupied with their domestic duties, blithely unconscious of the incongruous spectacle which they provided.

They were a motley crew, and composed as many different types of manhood as any group of its size in any part of the world would possess. But this much they had in common: a sun tanned leanness of countenance and an awkward twist of the legs which severally had been bestowed by the hot sun and an undeviating devotion to the saddle; also, while each countenance might differ, each countenance was rough in that sense of the word which denotes an excess of masculinity untempered by a woman's influence, and unsoftened by solicitude for feminine regard. The group that filled the ranch house had the barbarous aspect of a pirate crew—and, like a pirate crew, they placed upon the life of a man no value save that which the man himself imposed.

While the rude breakfast was prepared, Dasent sat silent, or silently strode like a nervous cat about the room rolling and smoking innumerable cigarettes. His dark eyes, glittering from the hollows of fatigue, and his haggard face, bore out grotesquely his likeness to some beast of prey waiting for the bars to fall which caged him from the hunt. He met their questions with monosyllables of protest, and they revealed another characteristic of their kind when

they resigned themselves to patience with good humor.

They ignored him as they bustled unhandily about their absurd housework, and when all present fell to the wretched fare upon the rough board table few words were spoken. The unclean coffeepot had been drained to the dregs and the last canned bean devoured when Dasent interrupted the coarse pleasantries that passed across the board with a terse disclosure of his purpose.

"They're hidin' out!" he announced abruptly.

"We still out to get 'em?" asked one.

Dasent glowered at the man for a second and then answered with a ferocity that brought their eyes upon him in a narrow, appraising gaze.

"We herd them in, if it takes a year!" he snapped.

"You didn't get no whiff of his trail last night?" Tansey was scarcely less weary than his leader.

"I tell yer he's hidin' out. I want you punchers should git out to the hills and comb them like you was lookin' fer ticks. You an' me, Snuff, we're ridin' the range. I don't want to think them hambres is sittin' easy in any ranch around."

He sat with his elbows on the table and glowered moodily into the distances which the walls seemed to open to his gaze. "We will root 'em out if they're dug in as deep as hell!" he cried suddenly, and then lapsed into a silence that had the singular effect of seeming as sudden as his speech. The rest were silent, too.

Then one pushed back his chair, and the others, excepting Tansey, followed. The sun was now high, gleaming ruthlessly on the rock littered country without, and the men turned to that sun baked exterior with an apparent reluctance, as if they were unaccustomed to facing the rigors of the heat in their work of every day. As they grouped in the doorway, Dasent suddenly leaped to his feet and hurled a storm of words upon them.

"Dead or alive!" he cried in his high, strained voice. "That's what the old man said. Yo're to bring them in dead or alive, and there ain't to be no foolin' that 'll let

happen what happened last night. Ef there is resistance, shoot 'em down. Ef Preest don't come, shoot him an' shoot quick! Likewise don't fool with Aleck Sheffield. Shoot on sight. An—" He caught his breath suddenly, gulping. "The boy!" His voice cracked. "If the boy throws talk, *shoot him!* He's got to come back. Dead or alive!"

The men in the doorway regarded him gravely. He stood leaning over the table, glaring back at them.

"That's what the old man wants!" he gritted. And save for a brief pause for assurance, they accepted that command without a word.

"There won't be no foolin'," said Merle Sandies, as they trooped out through the door, and his words were a tribute to the far-reaching power of Old Man Parmelee. "Meet here tonight?"

"Shore, fer supper."

When the door had closed behind them, Dasent sank down into his chair. His mouth was twisted into a queer, complacent grin, but there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. Tansey addressed him with labored carefulness, speaking slowly.

"Seems like yo're takin' considerable chances, Jud, takin' the old man up thataway. They're all primed to shoot daylight out of these fugitives."

Dasent grinned with more assurance.

"The old man said it," he repeated.

"But there's the kid."

"Shore!"

"It wouldn't be so good if he got shot."

"An' why not? Isn't that what the old man said? Dead or alive, he said. 'An' that meant the kid inclusive.' Again the queer, cracked note came into his voice.

"An' if that ain't what he meant, he's got hisself to blame!" he cried. "You said we ain't his dogs nor hawses. But that's how he treats a man. All right, he's got hisself to blame ain't he, if we take his orders straight?"

Revelation dawned in the mind of Tansey, and incredulously he acknowledged it.

"My Godfrey, Jud!" he cried, "yo're lookin' fer the inside of hell."

"I'm lookin' to even things up with Old Man Parmelee," asserted Dasent.

Tansey looked at him curiously. He was listening to a voice which resounded in his memory; the voice of Harper Preest. "Two skunks can't play without fightin'!" the man had cried. And he had added something about the teeth of Old Parmelee in Dasent's throat.

"No chance!" he warned.

Dasent grinned.

"It's a chance in a hundred. There ain't nobody on this range but knows how the old man's dealt with me. This ranch was mine. This house I built myself an' hauled the lumber through the sun in a hell of work an' sweatin'.

"He took it—the range knows that. He took me over, lock, stock an' barrel, and there ain't nobody that ain't sneered at the way I've played in with him since; doin' what he tells me. Playin' the right bower to his ace. Takin' orders."

He grinned down upon Tansey now with a satisfaction that soothed his agitation and made him to appear almost unctuous in his complacency. "The Old Man, *he* ain't been one to sneer. Oh, no! Not him! There's two kinds o' men, he brags to my face. One fights him, an' the other he breaks. Me, I'm broke!" he laughed queerly.

"Broke to harness, I am. Broke an' all reliable to do what he tells me to the last gasp. Now won't it be sort of nice, Tansey? Won't it be sort of high up an' satisfyin' to the old man *when I bring in his own boy dead, because he told me to?*"

CHAPTER XI.

NO CHILD'S PLAY NOW.

THERE were three of them in a cave. It had been a boy's dream of pirates and buccaneering that had led David to that rocky cañon eight years before; and it had been the everlasting, undying spirit of boyhood deeply rooted in his heart that had caused Aleck Sheffield to follow the youngster there and throw himself into the pirate play while at the same time he had manfully but good naturedly scoffed at the intensity of the little fellow's pretense.

The young man and the little boy had

played that pirate game in their wild cave together with such earnestness of imagery on the boy's part and, on the part of the man, such sympathy as the boy in him and his loyal affection for David combined to engender, that they had quite failed to notice the years pass by. Even now, in that place, they could find the spirit of boyhood and win it back again.

David stood in the entrance to the cave, and he was cut clean from foot to waistline by the black shadow of the rocky wall behind him. On one side of him lay the dark, cool interior; on the other jagged and shattered walls of rock that crowded the floor of the cañon and made intricate corridors of stone which baffled search. In the thousand years before David and Aleck had come there no horseman had ever entered that mass of forbidding stone.

David had clambered down from the cañon rim on the day he first discovered it, his lithe body wriggling heroically from toe hold to hand grasp on the jagged surfaces. In the many mysterious games which followed he had come with Aleck as smuggler, pirate, Macedonian conqueror, or Indian scout, and they had devised many shifts of knotted ropes and flimsy ladders for the descent to the fantastic depths. It had been years before they worked out a pathway from the cañon's mouth through which they might bring their ponies as a hero of Arabian Nights adventure threaded the mazes of far dreams.

And such was the gigantic litter of the shattered granite through which that pass ran; such was the varied pattern of the shadows which were cast, and so brilliantly deceptive were the patched colorings of the rock, that many horsemen might have threaded that maze at once and cheated the watcher from the cañon's rim of any glimpse of a moving thing.

"I told you that the Pirate's Cave 'd turn out useful," David gloated as he stood in the entrance.

Aleck grinned, remembering the good-natured ridicule with which he had often covered the protest his man's mind had made against playin' Injun with a kid.

"You win, Dave," he admitted. "They wouldn't no more find us here than a tick

in a tub of axle grease. Not unless they ride plumb over the edge. Then we eat hawse meat fresh instead of out o' cans." He was heating corned beef in a skillet over a fire that burned against naked rock and found vent for its smoke through a natural crevice.

The third member of the party gazed from an obscure corner of the cave with a mixture of hunger and resignation.

"I ain't kickin' about the pirates," complained Harper Preest, "but I shore wished you left the centipedes out o' this yere cave."

He reclined upon an outspread tarpaulin, making no move to assist his saviors with their housework, and his attitude appeared to be one of criticism. His long and narrow face turned on a neck of remarkable thinness as he looked about the cave.

"Are them hawses goin' to be fed?" he asked.

They had ignored his first complaint, but at this Aleck, while not acknowledging Preest's presence in the tiny shelter, gave the matter consideration.

"When you an' me was in the smugglin' game, Dave," he said, "it was shore regrettable we didn't smuggle in some hay. Them hawses will have to be fed in the night."

"An' if we have to ride 'em to-day, they flop!" remarked Preest sardonically.

David, whose dark eyes had been watching Aleck's movements without a sign that he had heard the remarks of either man, spoke with the reflective gentleness of a boy eighteen years of age, who is dreaming dreams.

"You know, Aleck," he said, "when you spoke about the time we was smugglers or pirates in this cave, it sort of bobbled me all up in my thinkin'. Because when you said that, I was standin' here lookin' out over the shadows on the rocks, an'—it's sort of funny—but I wasn't anything else but just a kid agen, an' that's just what you an' me was doin'—playin' pirates together." He peered into the cave of reflectively.

"Lord, Aleck," he said, "it don't seem like there's any time gone since then. It don't seem like I was a man now, an' them

games was all over an' done with. It don't seem like that real enemies with real guns might come down from the cañon top an' hunt us out in real earnest. It's a queer thing, Aleck."

Aleck, for whom this was a trifle profound, endeavored to evade the issue.

"Everybody grows up, Dave," he said.

"Shore. It ain't that. But everybody don't grow up to find things like they are here on the range, Aleck. Everybody don't grow up to see men fightin' like rattlers fight king snakes, killin' an' murderin' for the meat they want an' the power. In other places, Aleck, I think there are kids grow up to see men live together like you an' me, an' there must be places where when a man's right, he can lift up his head an' say so. An' dreams an' games like ours ain't only things for kids to play at, but the right things that come into a boy's head can stay there an' grow, an' be the things he lives for in the friendship of all the men in the world."

Aleck turned from his cooking and looking into the boy's eyes, saw the inevitable fire there. David's light, serious voice went on, sounding a strange song in the cave.

"It seems like that if that kid who used to play with you, Aleck, was another kid, not me, but some other kid that I knew, an' the high dreams he had was torn to pieces in front of his eyes, like these here dreams have been, why Aleck, I think I'd want to fight for that kid. I'd go to the men who hurt him an' I'd say: 'Give this kid back his dreams! Give this kid back the things he knows are right. You hurt him an' you bruise him, like he was a dog that had done you wrong—but he ain't. He's only a kid who can see things right. An' I'd fight for him, Aleck, because I'd be feared he'd lose out, and get to be like the others."

His voice stopped and he stood silhouetted against the sunlight as if quite contented that his words should bring no answer. Aleck had turned back to his cooking before the boy's voice had finished, but Preest had not missed a word.

"That's damn foolishness!" he ordained scornfully. And Aleck turned on him passionately, whereupon it developed that

he had turned back to his cooking because his eyes were strangely dimmed.

"Shut up!" he cried shortly. "You ain't worth lickin' his boots, Preest. An' yo're due to keep yore trap shut. Now!" His last word served effectively to silence the protest which arose to the lips of the astonished man, and Aleck turned almost apologetically to David.

"Dave," he said, "there's a stack of kids in yore boots that wouldn't have only an obituary to pronounce on them high-up thoughts an' dreams you speak of. You, yo're still up an' fightin' for 'em. Which I want to say that me, I'm fightin' for that kid you spoke of, too." And he turned quickly to his skillet.

When he considered the mess of canned meat was sufficiently cooked, he whisked it from the fire and set it down, steaming, upon a grocery box which occupied the center of the floor. Then he took a number of tin pie plates in his hand and dealt two of them onto the rude table as if they were cards dealt from the pack. Taking a third in his hand he looked contemplatively upon the recumbent form of Preest.

"You wanna eat?" he asked silkily.

Preest tilted his narrow face upward, peering at him.

"You go to grass!" he said amiably. "You talk o' high-up, loco aspirations an' such, an' then you plumb torture a man."

"Give him his dinner, Aleck," pleaded David. Sheffield protested.

"Now Dave," he urged, "you know how you said I was to have free say about this." He turned to Preest. "You know how the deal stands," he warned him. "When you come clean, you get fed."

"I told yer how it was, I can't do no fairer than that, can I?" he cried.

"Likewise you told a tarnation lot o' lies," quoth Aleck. "When I asked you real gentle, what the old man wanted yore hide for, you talked up all virtuous an' untruthful. Now the kid here, he's riskin' his neck fer you, an' I don't want he should take no chances on a stacked deal. When you lay down yore cards all plain and regular, tellin' me just what Old Man Parmelee's got to hang you on, then you eat. Otherwise, not."

Preest stared at him closely, fingering with a lean hand at his belt which was loose about his waist.

"I told you," he snapped obstinately.

"You told me you was a shinin' angel as innocent as a new thrown calf. I want the truth," drawled Aleck.

"A man can't starve!" whined Preest.

"That's my argument," grinned Aleck.

"An' if I tell the honestergod truth?"

"It depends."

Preest appealed to the boy.

"If I lifted a maverick it ain't any worse'n what the old man's done," he pleaded. David had to think that over. He regarded Preest with a thoughtful frown, his earnest eyes dark in the diffusion of the light that glared in the entrance behind him.

"Then yo' shore 'nuff been rustlin' cattle!" snapped Aleck.

"What then?" demanded Preest.

Aleck would have retorted with an answer, but David's quiet voice was quick before him.

"I told my father," he said, "that if you'd been stealin' cows, there was a law to take care of you. That's why I did what I did. If you shore 'nuff been stealin' cows, then we take you to the sheriff."

He spoke very quietly, as a youthful judge whose mind was immutably fixed upon his judgment. But the calm, level voice of the boy seemed to strike Preest like a lash. Suddenly white as death, he leaped to his feet and glared wildly about, the terror of a hunted animal upon him.

"I knowed it!" he cried, and the cave echoed his despair. "You turn me over to the sheriff. To Westock! Another of his hounds. You turn me over to be hung!"

"To justice!" cried David. He sprang to his feet, his cheeks aflame with protest. "It's to the law, Preest. I don't aim to punish you. It's just what the law says." Wanting words, he turned to Aleck appealingly. "Tell him, Aleck."

"Set down, Dave," urged that gentleman, "an' eat yore food while it's hot. You, Preest, you'd best take some food, too. We know how you stand now."

Preest stood rubbing his damp palms upon his thighs.

"I'd ruther starve than take chances with Westock," he growled.

"Eat," urged Aleck. "The kid's playin' this game to save yore neck," he turned to David who was reluctantly seated on the cave's floor beside his plate. "But you give him over to Westock, Dave, an' he'll hang shore as shootin'," he said.

"Westock's the sheriff," protested David.

"They'll take him away from Westock."

"But that's—that's—"

"No, it ain't. Not in this country. Westock, he wouldn't do no more than just turn him over at the first sight of Dasent's guns. He's got his orders, Westock has."

David gazed for a moment upon his friend, gazed too, at the wretched prisoner they had saved from the hanging; then without a word he bent his round head to the food before him, and the three fell to eating with that solemn discontent of men who can find no words for thoughts which rankle.

David first broke the silence after he had polished off his plate and scraped the skillet of all that his companions left. He arose to his feet and spoke with that quiet determination which since the night before appeared to have developed from an occasional characteristic into an integral part of the boy's nature.

"Aleck," he said, "I'm goin' home an' see dad."

"No!" Aleck arose, quick in protest. He remembered the old man's parting shot.

"Got to." The boy voiced the conclusion to which long thought had brought him. "This thing's got to be straightened out."

"But they're huntin' the country for us!" Aleck suddenly stepped to the boy and took him by the arm. He spoke as a fond brother might speak to a younger one, bending his head a little to peer into the boy's eyes, gripping his arm firmly, as if to steady him against the shock of words. "Dave! Dave, old kid, I didn't tell you all the truth about the old man, Dave. He's out to get Preest dead or alive, an' fer you, Dave, he's out to take orf yo're hide with a rawhide whip."

David had need of that firm arm then.

His body leaped in the man's strong grasp as the body of a colt leaps at the touch of the branding iron. His smooth cheek blanched, and having yielded to the shock which wracked his body, he stood rigid, gazing with hurt eyes into those of his friend.

"He—said—that?" A low, unbelieving voice that came out of the boy's hurt soul.

"That's what he said, Dave." Aleck might have been a mother then, soothing her troubled child. There was that infinite tenderness in his voice; that note of sympathy which revealed that he, too, suffered.

"Then I must go!" cried David. "I must go to him, Aleck. I must."

"You can't do nothin', Dave."

"I can!" David exclaimed.

"What can you do?"

"I can bring back that little dawg she gave me!" And without further speech David disappeared into the maze of rocky passages which led from the cave to the place where their ponies were.

Aleck stood, stricken with amazement. The boy's last cry had been so astoundingly unexpected; had revealed a hidden current of thought in his mind of which Aleck had had no suspicion.

"The little dawg," he whispered to himself.

"The kid's loco," growled Preest.

"Shut up!" snapped David's friend.

CHAPTER XII.

VANISHING DIVIDENDS.

LANK JIM HENDRY had established the Monkey-wrench brand in the valley of the Pajaritos in a day when the cow-punchers were all dark faced *vaqueros*, the horse herd a *caballado*, and the limpid patois of the Mexican peon was the language of the range. So the Monkey-wrench outfit was among the oldest of the country.

Young James Hendry, having inherited that outfit, took advantage of the prosperity which Lank Jim, his father, had wrung from it, to play the cattle baron in the stockyard district of a great city and leave the sun-baked spaces of his native range for what men he could employ to ride them. It had been several years since his last visit

to the range, and now he had rolled out of the East by roads of steel and in the comfort of a soft cushioned motor car because the prosperity of his ranch had seemed to wane.

He was a shrewd business man, was Jim Hendry, and under the suave and polished manner he had acquired in the disposal of fat dividends, was hidden an instinct that brought him quickly to a personal investigation of this, the least of his enterprises, when the balance sheet sounded its alarm.

Madge had accompanied him, because the West had appealed to her sense of the romantic—and she had decided to come. A respect for the decisions of one's daughter develops amazingly with the prosperity of one's affairs. So do her decisions.

They had been here six days, now. Hendry, far too wise to "raise dust" as he knew the ranch employes would expect him to, had spent that time in genially making the acquaintance of his men, studying the country, and sending many fears for his intentions fast to sleep.

Madge had learned what it is to ride the ponies of the range in a huge stock saddle, and had further gone afield to fish in the clear green waters of the Rio Felix, and to fetch from White Oak the litter of puppies which her favorite dog had sired. She had promised herself another adventure soon, for surely it was only right that she should keep an eye on the puppy that had gone to the boy on the trail. Frank, the kennel man, would want to know about them all. It was a part of the business of owning thoroughbred dogs.

"Where is Dasent?"

Her father asked the question quite amiably at the luncheon table, and Madge listened for the reply; she had heard that name before. Lew Brady, whose appearance was made remarkable by the fact that he had hair the color of tow and no chin whatever, assumed his famous worried look. Lew was a kitchen hand and chore boy at the Hendry ranch, and he was often worried.

"He's out on the range, I reckon," he ventured.

Hendry frowned.

"I thought the men came in every night

these days," he said. "Dasent doesn't do any line riding, does he?"

"Not a lot," explained the youth. "But there's a sort of committee out right now. They want this Harper Preest that's been rustlin' cattle an' such. Dasent, he's in charge."

"Where's the sheriff?"

Lew betrayed a flutter of confusion, but overcame it manfully.

"He's out, too, I reckon," he said.

Hendry ate for a moment in silence. He meant to go slowly. He divined the futility of running counter to the customs of the country and he was only vaguely aware of what those customs were.

"When he comes in," he said, "tell him I want to see him."

"Shore." Lem lolled back against the sideboard and chinlessly watched them eat.

"Dasent," said Madge reflectively, "that's the man who 'don't exactly work for two men at once.'" She imitated David's drawl very prettily.

"What do you mean by that?" asked her father, with some amusement.

"The boy I gave that puppy to," explained Madge. "His father took over Dasent's ranch, and now this man Dasent does things for his father and works at this ranch as well."

Hendry thought that over. Factory espionage had been to him an elementary means of affecting the profits of his competitors; this appeared as if he had unearthed the reason for the diminution of the profits of his ranch.

"Who is this boy?" he demanded.

"I don't know. Who is he, Mr. Brady?" Her request was laden with an ineffable sweetness and Lew, not for the first time, was seduced by it.

"Must be Old Man Parmelee's David," he spilled forth.

"Old Man Parmelee?" Hendry was trying to recollect that name.

"Shore. He's over twelve miles this side of the Bitter Creek trail." Lew, conscious that he was babbling, and yet helpless under the mischievous eyes of his employer's daughter, wobbled his lower jaw spasmodically. "He's all right," he added weakly.

"I want you to go and tell Grey that I'm

going over the books this afternoon," said Hendry shortly.

"Shore." Lew hurried off upon his errand. He was glad to leave the field of those disturbing eyes.

"Goody!" cried the lady. "Then you won't want the car."

"No. Where do you plan to go?"

"Over to Old Man Parmelee's," smiled Madge. "I've got to look after that poor puppy."

Hendry gave her a quick glance of surprise. Having scented an unscrupulous rival in this Old Man Parmelee, he had taken it for granted that Madge had sensed it, too; but now gazing at her he immediately discerned that she had been quite deaf to the real burden of his questioning. Her mind really appeared to be upon the puppy and its future. It occurred to his resourceful mind that this might not be without its value.

"A good idea," he said. "I think it would be nice for you to make friends with these people. They're really our neighbors, you know. Tell Mr. Parmelee that I'll come over and call myself."

She smiled brilliantly.

"That's a good daddy," she cried, and patted his hand, so that he was reminded keenly of the love he bore her.

CHAPTER XIII.

WARRIOR BRED.

MADGE drove up to the Parmelee ranch very prettily. The wheels of her car spurned the broken rocks of the roadway with a noisy rattle, and her tires whined on the clay. She whirled up the terrace and brought up short with great neatness, and when she sprang from the car her slim form in riding clothes of thin apple green material flashed in the sunlight like the embodiment of spring.

Old Man Parmelee, sitting in his chair, must have been immeasurably surprised at her appearance, but his countenance betrayed no sign of the effect her coming made.

"Are you Mr. Parmelee?" she asked prettily.

"That's me," he admitted, and his frozen blue eyes played upon her like the reflection of sunlight from the ice.

"I'm Madge Hendry," she said, and held out her hand. He took it, but that was because he knew of nothing else to do. He held it for an instant, but his hand hardly closed upon it. "We're visiting the ranch," she explained.

"Shore."

"Is your son here?" she asked.

"David?"

He stared at her silently for a moment.

"He's away," he replied finally.

"I—we met down at the creek—at the Dasent place," she said, and stopped short, for his cold eyes had darkened.

"You gave him that pup?" he demanded.

"Yes," she smiled brilliantly. "That's what I came here for. To see the puppy. How is it?"

Again his gaze slowly examined her in a cold silence. He dwelt upon her costume, redolent of expensive Eastern shops; he observed her untanned face with the flush in her cheeks, and her bright eyes. He noticed her hands, soft and white, unmarred by toil.

"You an' David ought to be right good friends," he remarked; and instinctively she resented the frigid sarcasm in his voice. "There ain't no girl in these parts that's soft enough fer David to know. And men, he finds them rough."

He leaned forward suddenly and his voice took on a darker significance. It startled her, having in it the essence of a passion which had never touched her life. "What did that kid tell you?" he demanded.

"Tell me?" she cried, unaccountably indignant.

"He spoke to you about that Dasent ranch?"

She instantly divined the reason for his anger. This matter of Dasent, the man who worked for two masters at once, had caused David to shut up like a clam, and her father to take on the thoughtful brow of business hours; there was some magic to make men rude in the position of this man Dasent.

"No," she answered. "He wouldn't an-

swer questions. They told me that out in this country people who were polite didn't ask them."

Old Man Parmelee grinned dourly, concealing a stormy sea of resentment. This girl, with her dainty clothes and unspoiled airs; this offspring of Hendry, the absentee victim of his rapacity, called forth neither kindness nor courtesy from him. And now she was flinging his words back into his face.

Again Old Man Parmelee felt that uneasy sense of waning power. Again he felt that his hand was no longer as strong to control as it was in the past, and he revolted against it.

"Yore friend David," he said brutally, "is away hidin' in the hills. He played like a fool an' a woman till I took him in hand to train; then he spited me!" His lips curled in an unpleasant smile as he saw her troubled frown. "I got men out on the range now for to round him up. When they bring him in, I'm going to show him what it means to cross me!"

Still regarding her with his bitter, sardonic eyes, he arose slowly from his chair. "It was that pup that done it!" he burst forth with unreasonable resentment. "His yellow, livered sperit couldn't bear to see the pup treated like a dog!"

He put forth one hand and took her by the arm.

"Now you come with me, missy, an' I'll show you what I'm goin' to do. Some time you'll see him again. Then I want you should tell him just what you seen done here to-day."

He stepped toward the door, his hand strong upon her wrist.

"But no!" she cried, although she felt no panic. "I can't go in with you!"

"Come on in," he grinned. "Don't you be scared. You got to see what I'm goin' to do! You got to see it! Come on!"

Without the slightest fear, and with considerable curiosity, she followed this queer man into his house, and shuddered at the barren disorder of the room into which he led her.

"Set down," he said, and indicated a chair. She seated herself, and watched him as he walked stiffly and evidently with

great effort over to a far corner of the great room.

There he stooped suddenly and picked up in his big hand the puppy she had come to see. He held it by the scruff of the neck, and bore it to another corner of the room where, from a littered table he procured a pair of enormous shears. Then he came back to her and placed the puppy on a packing box beside her chair, holding it by the loose skin about its shoulders.

"There!" he said with the strange, disturbing grin upon his face. "Now you look what I'm doin'. I'm goin' to trim this pup's ears, an' I'm goin' to clip his tail, an' I want you should tell him of it when you see him!"

She jumped to her feet and drew away from him.

"But why should I?" she cried.

She divined that behind the glistening malice of his eyes lay something of greater significance than this trivial matter of trimming a puppy's ears. And he was not loath to betray it.

"There ain't no wickedness like the wickedness of a boy to his father!" he cried bitterly. "An' to save a brute beast its proper treatment, he'd undo the work of my life.

"I want him to know that the pup got its sufferin' anyway. I want you should tell him how it yelped an' cried when the shears cut into its flesh. How it howled in pain in spite of his playin' the fool."

He fastened upon her a smile which was a leer, and she stood transfixed by this revelation of the tortuous pathways of the old man's mind. It seemed incredible that he meant thus to triumph over his son, but she didn't know that a passion more crafty than the sense of triumph was at work.

She didn't know, for instance, that Old Man Parmelee, confident that David would see this girl before ever he thought to return to his father, counted upon her recital of this scene to bring David hurrying home. It is possible, indeed, that Old Man Parmelee was not as blind to the peculiarities of his son's ardent temper as he seemed.

He grasped the puppy with needless violence, bunching in his great hand the loose skin about its shoulders, hurting it so that

it wriggled in protest but gave forth no whimper of pain.

"Torture, he called it," he sneered as he raised the shears. "Like a woman would. I want you should tell him how his puppy squealed."

She gazed upon him with eyes wide open, her face blank in puzzlement.

"But that dog won't squeal!" she cried. "It's an English bull terrier. They never cry out!"

The shears clanged as he dropped them on the box and leaned there with one hand heavily upon the board. He stared at the girl as if he were a child and she his teacher, inflicting a distasteful lesson.

"It won't?" His tone was so lugubrious that she smiled as she answered him.

"Mercy, no. It would take more than a trimming to make that puppy cry. His father is Shropshire Rex the Third." She caught her breath suddenly, appalled by the cloud that fell upon him. Sweeping the unfortunate animal up in his hand he looked at it as if it were a thing accursed.

"Won't cry?" he roared. "I say it *will* cry! I want it should cry! I'll make it!" And hurling it to the ground, he kicked at it viciously.

"Don't do that!" she cried, and seized him by the arm. "That's mean! That's brutal!"

He brushed her hand from him, and in an excess of rage, jabbed at the puppy with his heel.

"Yelp! Yelp out! Howl!" he cried. "I want he should know that it hurt."

The puppy, having injured a leg in its fall, and further tortured by the man's vindictive foot, edged away, snarling and limping; but it did not cry out, nor did it run away. Instead it hurled an infantile defiance at the man, growling bravely through its clenched milk teeth at the brute which kicked it.

Madge, impotent against the man's fury, cried out one angry, inarticulate cry, and darted forward to take the dog from his way, but Old Man Parmelee pushed her aside with a warning.

"Git away!" he cried. "I'll kill the little rat." And he would have done so, too; killed it or maimed it in his insensate

fury, but as the girl staggered back from his rude shove, the door opened and David entered the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE KNOT.

"AIN'T you got nerves? Ain't you got feelin's?" screamed the exasperated old man as he stumped forward, leaning on the table to lunge out with one foot at the wretched puppy. But David sprang lithely from the doorway to push his father back and sweep the little animal up in his arms.

"You leave it be!" he cried. "It's mine."

With the injured puppy clutched against his breast the boy tossed back his head and fixed shining eyes upon his father.

"That's one thing you got to leave be," he said.

Man and boy ignored the girl as they stood there facing each other. Old Man Parmelee, having been pushed almost from his precarious balance by the exuberance of David's onslaught, now firmly grasped the high back of a chair before him and stared at his indignant son.

As usual with these two, a turmoil of thought passed in their minds between what time they spoke, and Madge, kneeling on the hard earthen floor, saw the face of Old Man Parmelee as his mind worked furiously in that silence become gradually harder, gradually beclouded by the darkness of a ruthless determination.

His hands left the back of the chair and in his peculiar stiff-legged manner, he walked to the wall beside the fireplace. He spoke as he walked, and Madge Hendry, watching and listening, felt her heart contract within her as she sensed impending tragedy. The boy stood with the puppy in his arms, folded to his breast, and watched his father's movements.

His face was flushed so that his cheeks shone apple red, and his dark eyes glowed handsomely. He seemed marvelously unperturbed, yet there was a certain set alertness in his face, and a great deal of resolution.

"So you come back," said his father, as he moved to the wall. "You come back. An' the first thing you do is to sling yore spite out at me like a rattler."

His voice rose to a sudden harshness. "Well, I'm glad you come!" he cried. "I told Aleck Sheffield what I was goin' to do to you when you come back, an' now I'm goin' to do it! I'm goin' to whip you till you yell out for mercy." And his hand clutched the stock of a rawhide whip that hung at the mantel side.

Springing to her feet the girl gasped out something incomprehensible, inarticulate; but neither the boy nor the man took notice of her.

"Father! You won't." In that cry David voiced all the trust of a boy in his father's love and fairness, but the wretched man was deaf to the meaning of his voice.

"Ha! Yo're afraid. I knew it. I told 'em." The old man strode across the floor to the boy's side. "Save yore whines an' yore pleadin'," he rasped, "'cause you'll need 'em now."

David turned to grasp his father by the arm, but with great violence old Parmelee tore his grasp away.

"Yelp now!" he cried, and raising the whip he laid it with all his might across the boy's straight back.

"A-a-a-h!" David caught his breath, but that was all. He drew up his shoulders after that, and his head shrank down in an instinctive physical resistance to the blows which his father showered on him.

"Cry out! Yell! Yelp like the yellow dawg you are!" Old Man Parmelee shouted, and he lashed the boy again with all the strength of his arm. The third stroke snapped loudly, and the boy's shirt was ripped open as if by a knife.

David, clutching the puppy to him, made only one single sound. It came thickly through clenched teeth, and was preceded by a sharp intaking of the breath. As the fifth blow lashed across his back, he jerked out the one word. "No!"

"No! No! No! Stop you'll kill him!" shrieked Madge, and she grasped the old man by the arm. With a sweep of that arm he flung her away, and she fell back into a chair.

She leaped to her feet again, and ran terror stricken to the door, but found no help there. She ran from one corner of the room to the other, vainly, without reason or control, and came back to stand clutching at a chair back, seeming to feel every blow which fell upon the boy. And she felt the more keenly because she could now see the mark of the lash upon his naked back.

Old Man Parmelee had stood for a moment relaxed after flinging the girl from his arm, and David turned to him with compassion in his eyes where Parmelee had expected to find pain and resentment. At that the old man raised the whip and flourished it in the boy's face.

"You'll defy me!" he gritted. "You'll fix yer face to laugh at me. You think I can't make you cry." His passion was extraordinary, ludicrous.

In a sudden uprush of passion the old man seized the boy's shirt collar with both hands and ripped the shirt from his back.

"Now," he cried, "you'll beg for everlasting mercy!" The whip whined in the air and crashed viciously as it bit the smooth skin of the bare torso.

Madge shrieked. David's head sank forward, the puppy dropped to the floor and the boy drooped, supporting himself with his hands upon the table. The terrible old man braced himself, feet apart.

Then, blind to the red welts on the smooth skin of the boy's straight back, he raised his whip and brought the lash down again with a vicious whine. A scarlet stripe appeared as he raised the whip once more, but David, except for a writhing of the flesh beneath that satin skin, gave no sign that he was hurt. Again the lash fell, and the boy's back quivered as a thin stream of blood showed that the skin was cut through.

"Cry out! Fight! You puppy!" cried the furious old cattleman. "Yelp out, or I'll flay you alive."

Insanely he plied the lash, gasping with the effort of every stroke; flaying that satin skin with a madman's ardor. But David, his head low on his breast and one arm flung across his eyes in a protective gesture, which suggested that he tried to shut out an intolerable sight, jerked forth the thick word, "No!"

"You will! You will!" The whip cracked on the flesh again.

David caught his breath; there was a shriek of agony struggling in his breast for utterance, and the sweat streamed into his eyes, blinding him. Also there was an animal that tore at his muscles, urging him to turn on his tormentor and rend him with his hands.

He was not conscious of how he writhed and twisted as he supported himself there against the table. He was not conscious of anything save an agony of pain, a passion of black fury, and the desire to fall senseless and unconscious for evermore.

Crack! fell the lash, biting into the bleeding flesh, cutting the boy's young body with its curling cruelty. A tremulous sigh escaped from David's lips. He bit one wrist to keep his agony from utterance. His form drooped pitifully, and his head sank lower.

"You can't look at me! You can't fight! You can't howl! You can't look me in the face!" gasped the maniac who wielded the lash.

For answer, David dropped that guarding arm from his eyes, took up his dog in a protecting clasp and, drawing himself erect with a great effort, he turned upon his father the light of his brown eyes and all the conflicting passions which they held. No cry could have voiced the dreadful ardor of his eyes, and the flame of them, framed by the boy's glistening brow and clean cut, unfurrowed face, struck the old man with an awful accusation.

"Dad—" said the boy, and that was all he said. It was protest, and uncomprehending pain.

Old Man Parmelee stood with the whip in his hand upraised. He glared at the burning and intolerable passion of his son's straight gaze for a split second in awful silence, and then it was he who crooked one arm across his eyes.

It was the old man now who tried to shut out a sight he could not bear to see, and as the whip hand and the lash fell to the floor, there burst from his lips a stream of profanity which was the horrible voice of a man who in that moment knew no God. He stretched out his arms as he screamed.

His eyes glared glassily, and a thin foam gathered on his lips.

"It's there!" he screamed, with the incoherence of his dark emotion. "It's there! In his eyes! Still there!" and he tottered in his place as a tree totters before falling. He would have crashed as the tree falls, to the floor, had not David leaped forward and upheld him.

Madge saw the boy do this, and she had looked upon the entire incredible scene, through the red mist of nightmare, and she saw the old man's great hand clutch the boy's shoulders, so that as David, wincing, upheld his father, the man's hand was stained with blood. She saw that David desired to support his father to a couch and it released her from the horror that held her like a spell.

She stepped forward to help him; but David turned his dark eyes upon her, and his glance held her away, for his eyes contained an eloquence which was more moving than speech.

"It's my father," he murmured. "It's between us two. We can do all we have to do for each other alone."

With his tortured back still naked to the waist, his face wet with the perspiration of

his agony, and the lips she had seen so red in the sunlight now livid and twitching with great pain, David supported his father tenderly to the couch against the wall. There he laid him down and bent for a moment over him.

Then he arose to his full height and drew his torn shirt about his shoulders once more, quivering with the pain it caused him. This done, he paused for a moment and breathed deeply, then, reaching to his hip pocket he drew forth his father's gun and gently placed it above the head of the unconscious man. When he spoke, he spoke with an even, low voice, and he addressed the inert figure of his father with a queer confidence, as though he knew his words were heard.

"There was a time," he said, "when you was whippin' me, that I wanted to kill you. I wanted to kill you, dad. An' that, that's the worst thing that you've done."

"You made me so that I wanted to shoot you. But I ain't holdin' it agen you, dad—I—"

He stood silent for a moment, contemplating the drawn, gray face of the man.

"I ain't," he finished with a strange calmness in his voice.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

U U U

THE SHADOW

TWAS vespertide I idly dreamed
Beside the summer sea.

Out on the rocks the starlight gleamed,
Where the mermaids used to be.

I heard the dreamy lullaby
The sirens used to croon—

A shadow drifted through the sky,
Beneath the misty moon.

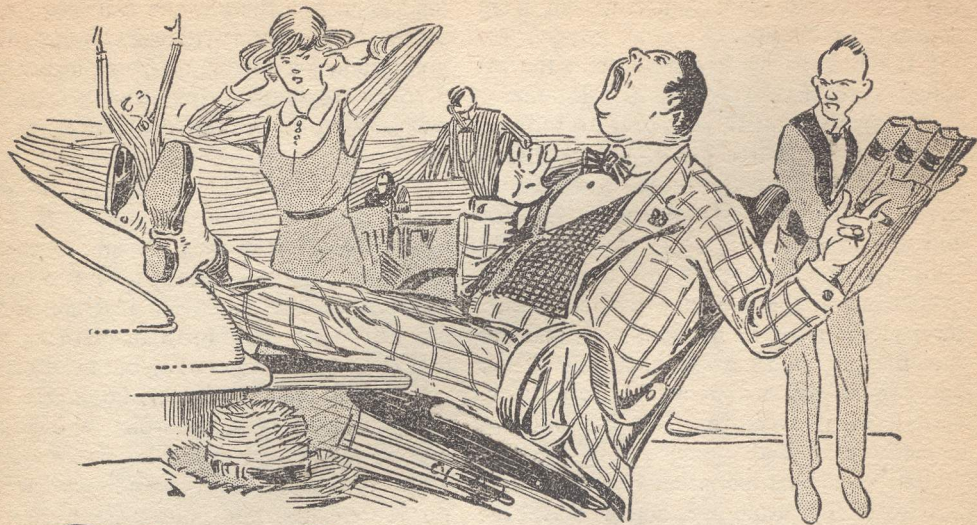
Fancy smote the bondman's chain
That linked me to life's toil—

That romance-tree bloomed once again
In the dead years' sacred soil.

I breathed the balm of South Sea isles
In the tropics' golden sheen—

Then a biplane whistled through the miles,
'Mid the fumes of gasoline!

Chart Pitts



The Goat-Getter

By JACK BECHDOLT

HIS name was Daly—Simms Daly. He appeared one winter day at the outside of the rail which separates the general public from the office force of the J. K. Blevitt Company, and demanded J. K. Blevitt in a loud, ringing voice. He was not an unusually large man, but he was clad at the moment in a coat of horsy checkered tweeds, a violent caterpillar fur hat, and smallpox-pitted yellow shoes, a bolshevik tie, and various other impedimenta which expanded him in the shocked vision of the beholders. His face had a ruddy glow, and as he smiled he displayed gleaming teeth that would have done credit to the bogus *Grandma* in "Little Red Riding Hood."

J. K. Blevitt chanced to be passing. J. K. Blevitt was a thin, dark, saturnine, nervous business man with a hundred worries and anxieties constantly riding him. At the loud noise Blevitt turned to the rail with a snarl: "I'm J. K. Blevitt, young man!"

"Good!" cried Simms Daly heartily.

"I am the man you have been looking for. Mr. Blevitt, I am a go-getter!"

Simms Daly leaned across the separating rail before J. K. Blevitt could move, and his hand plucked something from the shoulder of Mr. Blevitt's coat.

"Pardon me, Mr. Blevitt," Daly said, and ostentatiously deposited the hair he had plucked from Mr. Blevitt's shoulder far to one side.

"Don't do that!" cried J. K. Blevitt irritably.

Simms Daly laughed in high good humor—a ringing, loud, empty laugh, like the guffaw of the happy jackass. "It's all right, Mr. Blevitt! It's all right! It was not a blond hair! No, sir, it was gray. An oldish hair, Mr. Blevitt—one of your own gray locks!"

J. K. Blevitt hated to be pawed by strangers. If there was anything he despised, it was the imputation that a blond hair might be found on his shoulder. If there was one thing certain to make his blood boil, it was a reference to him as

gray haired or elderly. All three of these unpleasantly violent emotions seethed and bubbled within his breast as he glared at the stranger.

"As I was saying, Mr. Blevitt," Simms Daly went on, unperturbed by J. K. Blevitt's glare, "I'm a go-getter. I am the man you are looking for to jazz up your sales force. And I'm ready to go to work right now."

"Damn you, sir, I don't want a salesman—and if I was starving to death for a salesman, I wouldn't take you!" It was on the tip of J. K. Blevitt's tongue to say this to Simms Daly. But he did not say it.

The fact was, J. K. Blevitt needed a salesman very badly that morning—a man to visit the down town trade. Blevitt swallowed his indignation and managed to growl fairly mildly: "Come inside. I'll talk to you."

"You know the down town box trade, of course?" said J. K. Blevitt, after a short chat in which Simms Daly did most of the talking. To terminate the interview Blevitt already had agreed that Daly was to go to work and show what he could do. "You know the down town trade in boxes, Daly?"

"No, I don't. Never had the pleasure," Daly quoth in a good, loud voice, displaying all his fine teeth cheerfully. "Nope!"

"Well, then, how the devil—"

"There, there!" Daly cried, fending off his new boss with a soothing gesture which brought his palm to rest affectionately on Blevitt's trembling shoulder. "There, there! Don't you worry, Blevitt. I will know 'em! I'll know 'em like my own brothers by this evening. Everything's O. K., Blevitt. I'll get your orders!"

"By the eternal, you'd better!" said J. K. Blevitt in a strangled voice. "You'd better show me!"

Inwardly, Blevitt thought with vast satisfaction that he would not be bothered with Simms Daly for many hours. Daly would come back empty-handed, or with a pitiful showing of orders, and out Daly would go, assisted, figuratively speaking, by the toe of the J. K. Blevitt boot.

But Simms Daly came back that evening

with such a sheaf of orders that even J. K. Blevitt relaxed his grimness. Blevitt spoke to his cashier. "Put Daly on the pay roll for a week, until I can find a salesman who doesn't incite me to murder!"

II.

J. K. BLEVITT talked with Rudolph Reed, his general manager and a silent partner in the J. K. Blevitt Company. Rudolph Reed was ten years younger than Blevitt, though he did not look it. He was a man of fine physique, military carriage, and calm dignity. He dressed with meticulous care always, carrying to business his walking stick, his neatly creased gloves, wearing his dove-hued spats and Prince Albert coat.

J. K. Blevitt was the boss—a man feared and loved—but Rudolph Reed was the king of the office, a fair and just king whose person was held sacred.

Reed had just returned from an out-of-town journey.

"I had to take on a new down town salesman while you were gone, Rudolph," said Blevitt.

"Ha! I thought I saw a strange hat on the rack as I came in."

"Strange?" Blevitt cried. "Strange? You'd have seen a stranger coat under the hat, if you'd looked twice. And wait till you see what goes with the outfit! Rudolph, I guess I picked a lemon—"

"A dud, is he?"

Blevitt frowned. "He can sell like a blue streak!" Reed raised his eyebrows in question. "Yes," said Blevitt, "he can sell. I can't very well kick out a man who sells twice as much as Murphy used to in the same territory, can I, Rudolph?"

"Why should you, J. K.?"

"Wait till you meet him! Just wait till you know him, Rudolph! If you can stand this pest, I won't ever say another word! Come along, I want you to know Simms Daly!"

J. K. Blevitt dragged his partner and manager to the outer office and up to the desk where Simms Daly was most comfortably established. Simms Daly was going over his order book, humming a tune

in his fine, resonant voice. He hummed continuously, the same tune, over and over. You could hear him all over the room. A battery of eyes poured black looks upon him from every direction. Simms *Daly was oblivious of the hatred he engendered by his happy music.

Simms Daly clapped his order book down upon his desk with a bang like a bomb exploding in the quiet office. Swinton, the bookkeeper, jumped a foot off his high stool. His precisely poised pen dropped a nice, fat, fluid blob of black over the neat column of figures he had just transcribed from the day book. Swinton gazed at the wreck with a compound of despair and wrath.

Bertha Edge, the pleasant, blond stenographer, hit the keyboard of her machine with both clenched hands and broke a type bar.

Albert, the office boy, dropped the carafe of drinking water he was bearing to J. K. Blevitt's desk, and the broken glass crashed far and wide.

Simms Daly had clapped down his order book at sight of the boss. He was cheerily unaware of the devastation he had created. "Morning, Blevitt!" he hee-hawed.

"Shake hands with Mr. Reed, our general manager," Blevitt snorted in trembling rage. "This is Mr. Daly, Rudolph—"

Daly was out of his chair with a bound and his willing hands propelled the chair violently toward Reed. Daly's hand clamped onto Reed's shoulder and sought to press Reed into the chair, while his other hand caught at Reed's walking stick.

"No, no—I won't sit down," Reed protested. "No, you keep the chair."

"Nothing doing, Reed!" Daly declared, fighting to get the walking stick. "Let a lame man stand? Not me!"

"Lame?" Reed gasped.

"Lame?" Blevitt snorted. "Where do you get that stuff, Daly?"

Daly paused in his struggle, stared, and uttered his jackass guffaw. "I thought he was lame! He carries a cane!"

A sickly, poisoned silence came over the office as every man and woman caught his breath. In the silence Albert, the office boy, uttered a shrill, ghastly giggle and

tried to turn it into a cough. In spite of himself a dull red came into Reed's cheeks.

"You bonehead!" J. K. Blevitt sputtered. "I suppose you think Charley Chaplin is lame because he carries a cane?"

"That's one on me, boys!" Simms Daly chortled blithely. "Yes, sir, that's certainly one on me. But, sit down, and you, too, Blevitt!" He seized another chair and pushed it at Blevitt. "Go on, sit down! I'm a lot younger man than you two. I don't mind standing."

III.

"WELL," said J. K. Blevitt, when Reed stopped in his office at lunch hour, "you saw it! What are we going to do with it? How are we going to get rid of Daly—that's the question?"

Reed shook his head. His cheeks still burned a little as he thought of his cane. "What can we do, J. K.? Nothing, so far as I can see—"

"Can you stand for that bounding kangaroo with the jackass laugh?" Blevitt demanded, his eyes bulging.

"It's terrible," Reed admitted earnestly. "Terrible! And the worst of it is, the bouncer doesn't know he's offensive. Did you see his eyes when he called us old men? He really meant well—"

"Damn what he meant! He's got to be fired, Rudolph. How that laughing hyena manages to sell the trade, I don't know! But he can't stay on here!"

"Be fair, J. K. You can't fire a man because you don't like his laugh—especially the best salesman you've got! We've got to be fair!"

J. K. Blevitt bowed his head reluctantly. "All right, Rudolph. I guess you're right, at that."

Swinton, the bookkeeper, met Bertha Edge on her way to work one morning. "Say, I'm sore as a pup I couldn't get up to the party at your flat last night, Bertha!"

"Swinny," Bertha said earnestly, a strange trace of bitterness obscuring her usually good-natured face, "some people have got all the luck—you, for instance!"

"Luck! I don't call it luck, missing out one of your jolly evenings—"

"Jolly! Maybe they were jolly once! This one was gosh-awful ghastly, if you get what I mean. Oh, what an ending for an almost perfect party!"

"Why, Bertha, what—"

"Listen," Bertha said tensely, grasping the bookkeeper's arm by way of emphasis. "It was this pest, Simms Daly. Like a sap, I let him in! Oh, my gosh, Swinny—"

"What?" Swinton gasped.

Bertha whispered tensely: "You never guessed? Swinny, he's a barytone—"

"You don't mean to say he sings—in company?"

"Does he! I might have guessed it, from the noise he makes around the office; but I never tumbled, even when he showed up with a brief case bulging with sheet music. I supposed it was just some kind of sample case. Right in the midst of a fine evening, everybody getting chummy and talking and laughing and cutting up, this boob ducks out, gets his music, and takes the center of the floor. 'Well, boys and girls, Uncle Simms has got a nice little surprise for you! Uncle Simms is going to sing a little piece.'

"And he did. Yes, indeed, he did! He sang 'Asleep in the Deep,' and that one about the 'Sands of the Desert,' and a wop opera song about Donna Somebody, and on and on and on. Nothing could stop him short of an ax—and his skull would turn an ax; probably just ruin a real good blade. Nobody talked, after that, Swinny! The party was blotto!

"Pretty soon one and another said they guessed they'd have to drift along. They didn't even wait for refreshments—nobody but one or two tried and true friends—real pals! And Simms Daly, of course! He stayed till I yawned in his face and threw him out. Wanted to sing to me alone, but I stepped on that!"

"Ghastly!" Swinton sympathized. "It must have been a massacre. Something has got to be done, such as poisoning, to fix that go-getter!"

"Goat-getter, you mean," Bertha Edge declared morosely. "He's got mine, I'll broadcast!"

"You said it, Bertha! He's getting everybody's goat!"

IV.

AFTERNOON of the day before Christmas.

Throughout the J. K. Blevitt office rigid discipline of business had relaxed. The lunch hour rule was forgotten. Employees straggled in at two o'clock and at two thirty, their bundle-laden arms and the excitement in their faces excuse enough for one day.

Blevitt and Reed were in Blevitt's office. J. K. Blevitt was in a state of nerves technically known as a blue funk. No high-strung actor facing his first night suffered as J. K. Blevitt suffered on this one afternoon of the year.

It was the custom of the Blevitt organization to make Christmas presents. Bonuses, graded in amount according to earnings and length of service, were distributed by the head of the company. As a Santa Claus, J. K. Blevitt was a complete bust—a flop.

The best J. K. Blevitt could do was stagger feebly into the big office bearing his basket of envelopes, read out the name of each employee, and hand him his present with a nervous glare that suggested he was passing out two-week notices to everybody and sincerely hoped they would all starve to death in most pitiable circumstances before they got another job.

Once the employees had burst into J. K. Blevitt's office with a presentation walking stick and a traveling bag. They made speeches at him. Blevitt never fully recovered from the horrors of the day, nor his fear that the performance would be repeated.

That the blankety blank, dash, asterisk fools would keep quiet and take his money and let him alone was the dearest wish of his deeply sensitive soul. He loved them all, if only they wouldn't show any indecent gratitude!

Reed was busily checking over the bonus list and the envelopes. "All set!" he announced calmly.

Blevitt groaned, a hollow, croaking prophecy of disaster.

"Rudolph," he said, turning tragic eyes on his partner, "you do it!"

Reed shook his head. "No, they expect it from you, J. K."

"Rudolph, I'm damned if I will!"

"Yes, you will, J. K.! Buck up! Be a man!"

"Why should I? I don't like this Santa Claus business, I tell you! I'll forget my confounded speech. Good Lord! Where is that speech?" Blevitt began to paw his desk, sending papers flying. "Here," said Reed calmly, supplying the manuscript. "It's short enough. You can't possibly forget it."

J. K. Blevitt glanced once more over the speech, muttering its commendations and good wishes to the employees under his breath.

"Come on!" said his partner. "Time to go!"

As Reed opened the door, Blevitt grasped him anxiously, holding his arm back. "Rudolph! You—you haven't got a drink about you? Something real fiery?"

"Good Heaven, no, J. K.! Why, you're a rabid prohibitionist!"

"I know it," said J. K. Blevitt tearfully. "Been one all my life! Hate the stuff—hate the sight of it; but Rudolph, I wish to Heaven—I was drunk, right now!"

Reed opened the door and shoved his partner through.

Simms Daly had been waiting for this moment.

Simms Daly had heard from office gossip of the annual Christmas presentation. He was all primed for the joyous occasion. For an hour he had been circulating about the office, plotting.

When J. K. Blevitt tottered feebly into the room, the center of all attention, Simms Daly sprang to his feet and loosed his great barytone voice.

"For he's a jolly good fellow!
For he's a jolly good fellow!
For he's a jolly good fe-he-low
Which nobody can deny-hy."

Daly brayed lustily. At the end of the verse, in which a few straggling, shamed voices had joined, Daly roared: "Now,

boys and girls, everybody!" He brayed again, right lustily:

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

and the chorus became more general, incited by the man's overpowering ego. The office force rose *en masse* and advanced upon J. K. Blevitt, who faced them speechless, white with terror, clawing feebly with one arm at his basket of bonuses, with the other at Rudolph Reed."

"Join hands, everybody!" Simms Daly yelled.

They joined hands and circled round and round their helpless, trembling victim, roaring over and over:

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

Albert, the office boy, Swinton, the bookkeeper, Bertha Edge, the stenographer, old and young, high and low, the decorous office force of the J. K. Blevitt Company, went mad together, romping around J. K. Blevitt until his head swam and he stood weaving giddily, roaring out their nonsense about his being a jolly good fellow, while he glowered feebly and the sweat of a death agony streamed down his white face. The uproar quieted finally.

"Give him a cheer, boys and girls!" yelled Simms Daly. He began:

"He's all right,
Who's all right—"

in the approved manner of all cheer leaders, and the office force followed his lead, swept off their feet and driven to insanity by his noise and their own.

If J. K. Blevitt's fondest desire of the moment had come true and heaven had stricken them all dead, quiet could not have come more suddenly, absolute quiet in which the flushed, panting mob faced their employer.

Simms Daly yelled: "Speech, speech." Everybody knew that it was J. K. Blevitt's turn now.

J. K. Blevitt gasped.

Gone was all idea of speechmaking, of doing anything except getting away from there. Self-preservation, Nature's primal law, ruled J. K. Blevitt.

"Here!" he cried.

He threw his basket of envelopes at them and staggered feebly to his private office, Rudolph Reed bearing up his limp form.

V.

J. K. BLEVITT had his arms on his desk top and his head buried in his arms. From time to time he still shook unexpectedly with violent emotion.

Rudolph Reed came in from the outer office. "I got them untangled at last," he reported. "Everybody has his own envelope and is happy."

J. K. Blevitt gave a deep, ghastly groan. "Let me alone! Just let me alone, can't you!"

"All right, J. K.," Reed agreed soothingly. "All right!"

From the outer office came a sudden burst of song. It was the jackass barytone of Simms Daly, warbling happily, jubilantly:

"Till the sands of the de-hes-ert grow
co-ho-o-o-o-ld
And the scrolls of the he-heavens un-
fo-ho-o-o-o-ld—"

"No!" J. K. Blevitt screamed, leaping from his chair. "No, no, no!"

"No, what?" asked Rudolph Reed, looking up from the statement he was studying.

"Till the sa-hands—of the—de-hesert, grow co-o-old!" Simms Daly brayed.

Reed shuddered. "Ghastly, isn't it?"

"I won't have it!" shouted J. K. Blevitt hoarsely. "I won't. Why should I? This is my business, isn't it? I'll fire that infernal goat-getter to-day!"

Rudolph Reed started to nod enthusiastic agreement. Then a sudden frown checked his nod. "Oh, I say, J. K., this is Christmas!"

"I don't give a whoop what it is, Rudolph."

"Be fair, J. K. Be fair! He is another—goat-getter, as you say. He gets on everybody's nerves, yes. But you wouldn't throw a man out of a job to-day! The day before Christmas—"

"I'd throw that pest out of a job on his wedding day—if I had a chance!"

"No," Reed said firmly. "No, you wouldn't. Think it over. Spirit of the sea-

son, J. K.! 'Peace on earth, good will toward men—' "

"'Peace on earth'! How are you going to get peace even in this office while that jackass bays the moon?"

"Jackasses don't bay the moon—dogs may," Reed smiled.

In spite of his temper, J. K. Blevitt's lips twitched. "Well, anyhow, I'll get rid of that bird a long time before the sands of the desert grow cold! You watch my smoke—"

"Surely! But not to-day!"

"Well—all right," Blevitt conceded grudgingly. "Have it your own way!"

Reed rose, his business finished. At the door he paused. "I don't know why I should fight Daly's battles," he burst out. "Hanged if I do! He gets my goat, too, you know!"

Reed took the puzzle to his own desk in his own office. He was still wondering irritably why it was he always averted the ax from the neck of Simms Daly when the door burst open and Simms Daly presented himself with a loud, cackling: "Well, well, well! Greetings, Rudolph!"

Reed looked up, in his eyes the cold, steady regard he sometimes used to squelch objectionable pests. "Yes, Daly?"

Simms Daly was not feazed by Reed's death-ray eyes. The paralyzing chill of their steady glance ricocheted harmlessly from his thick complacency.

Daly pulled up a chair uninvited and laid a hand on Reed's arm. Reed hastily moved the arm, but Daly's hand followed it with a reassuring, friendly pat. Reed set his teeth and endured. "Well, Daly?"

"How's my sales record?" Daly demanded. "Made a pretty fair little showing the three months I've been with Blevitt, eh, Rudolph?"

"Yes," Reed said grudgingly, but always fair. "Yes. Very tidy."

"You said it, Rudolph! Tidy's the word. Pretty darn tidy, if you ask me. You know, Rudolph, I've done just about fifty per cent better than any man with Blevitt to-day. Now, haven't I?"

"Your record speaks for itself, Daly."

"It certainly does. You know, Rudolph, it just occurred to me if I was to leave

Blevitt—if I was to quit—it would make an awful hole in his business, now wouldn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Yes, you do know! Don't hedge, Rudolph!" In his exuberance Daly slapped Rudolph Reed on the back.

Reed moved his chair until the desk was between them. He gritted his teeth and tried to keep his eyes off a heavy paper weight so enticingly near his hand.

"If I was to quit it would take two live, hustling go-getters to keep up the pace I set all by myself!" Daly looked serious. "And yet, Blevitt only pays me the salary of one salesman! I don't know about that! I think I'd better talk this over with Blevitt."

"Yes," Reed said hastily, "if that's what you're thinking of, tell it to Mr. Blevitt. He's the man to see." He added with sudden, genuine astonishment: "How the devil you manage to sell our goods—a man with your manner—your perfectly hellish manner—I don't know! I don't, indeed!"

"You have noticed it? You've noticed the fault in my manner?" Daly's ruddy face grew serious, almost mournful. A sudden humility came over the man. Reed's words seemed to crumple him up.

Daly burst out: "It's apparent, I know! The fault is glaring! I try to kid myself that it doesn't show, but it does show. I try to cover it up, but it won't cover up, not altogether. But I'm working on it, Rudolph. Day and night I am striving to correct it!"

Simms Daly's eyes glistened with a great ambition.

"I will correct it," he vowed. "I can! I shan't stop until I do! Rudolph, if it takes my right leg I will overcome my lack of confidence—my confounded timidity!"

"Timidity!" Reed gasped. "Did I understand you to say—"

"Now, Rudolph, I know you want to say something nice, something to spare my feelings, but don't do it! Let's face facts! I'm a man and not afraid to face facts! I am timid. I'm too sensitive! No matter, I will overcome it!"

Simms Daly drew a deep breath and looked highly resolved.

Rudolph Reed was prey to a virulent mixture of astonishment and indignation that left him helpless to do or say anything fitting to the revelation. He felt slightly giddy. Again his eyes strayed to the heavy paper weight and his fingers itched to hurl it at Simms Daly. But what would be the use! To do that would only spoil a good bronze paper weight!

Simms Daly sank his voice to a confidential pitch. He rose in order to clasp his hand on his listener's arm while he confided:

"Let me tell you something, old man. Just between you and me. You think I'm timid now. I wish you could have seen me a year ago! In just one year, the change that has come over me would astonish you, if you only knew.

"A year ago this very Christmas, Rudolph, I picked up a magazine. I read an advertisement. An advertisement that began: 'You, too, have a Personality—Develop It!'

"It was an ad for a wonderful discovery, the invention of the Interallied Psychological Research Laboratories—a bunch of world famous scientists. Teaches you how to overcome your natural faults, how to make an impression, how to convince others, how to hold a company of brilliant men and women by your conversation, how to entertain, how to sell yourself! Get the idea?

"Every man has got it in him, the book says so. And I have proved it. Look at me!"

Simms Daly drew himself up for inspection.

"Look at me, Rudolph!"

His voice rose to a dramatic climax. "And would you believe it, a year ago to-day I was as hopeless and insignificant a little runt as you are! Yes, sir, Rudolph, nothing but a shy, insignificant, timid, underdeveloped pinch of nothing. The living image of what you are to-day!"

Reed sat perfectly still, petrified, at this revelation.

The shock of it really had paralyzed him.

A dozen retorts, a dozen methods of annihilating Simms Daly rushed through his mind, but his mind knew it was no use. Nothing he could do, nothing he could say, nothing in the world ever would get under

that rhinoceros hide and puncture the fellow's monumental self-satisfaction. Reed felt like a man going under for the last time, and not a straw in sight to buoy him up.

"Yes, sir," Daly repeated happily, "that's exactly the way I was. Listen, old man, I'm going to lend you that book. It will do you a lot of good!"

He turned to the door. "Now I guess I'd better have it out with Blevitt."

Something snapped in Reed's mind and brought events into sharper focus. "Wait!" he said. "I've got to talk to Blevitt first." Sinking for the last time, Rudolph Reed had finally perceived not a straw, but a whole life raft. Christmas or no Christmas, this marble-headed jackass was going to get what had so long been coming to him!

VI.

REED paused before he opened the door to the outer office and exchanged a last word with J. K. Blevitt. Both men were grinning wide, wicked grins.

"No slip-ups, now, J. K! No softening or relenting!"

J. K. Blevitt grasped an imaginary ax in both hands and flourished it around his head. He ran his thumb across the imaginary cutting edge of the imaginary tool and declared grimly: "This ax has got an edge like a razor! Bring on your victim!"

Reed paused uncertainly. "It seems kind of a shame after all, doing this on Christmas."

"You're too timid, Rudolph! Daly was right, you're a little, timid runt."

"Damn him!" Reed groaned. "He brought it on himself!" He opened the door and called into the outer office: "Oh, Daly! Mr. Blevitt will talk to you now."

Simms Daly came in humming in his resonant barytone. He sat himself in the chair J. K. Blevitt offered him with a flashing smile for his audience.

Reed had a mental picture of a man sitting down in the electric chair. But with a difference. In the electric chair a man knows what is going to happen to him!

"You wanted to talk to me?" J. K. Blevitt grunted.

"Yes, Blevitt, I did." The victim

reached his offensive paw toward J. K. Blevitt and succeeded in getting in a friendly pat on Blevitt's arm before Blevitt got out of range.

"I hope you'll take what I am going to say in the spirit it is meant. I know you will," Daly said. "I'm sure you're eager to do the right and square thing, Blevitt. You're a good old scout."

"Thanks!" J. K. Blevitt choked.

"And in a way, Blevitt, I'm sorry to bring up this matter at Christmas time. After your open-handed liberality to all of us, I—it doesn't seem grateful. But a man's got to think of himself first, hasn't he?"

"Yes," said J. K. Blevitt. He smiled craftily. "That's all right, my boy, speak whatever is preying on your mind."

"I will. Yes, indeed! We're all friends here, I hope! We understand each other! Well, as I was telling Rudolph, I've sold more goods for you than any two men. I've built up your business, haven't I?"

Blevitt said gravely: "Undoubtedly the present state of excellent prosperity in the J. K. Blevitt company is largely due to you, Daly."

"Yeah, and I'm a crackerjack, go-getting salesman, just like I told you when I came here."

"No use denying it, Daly!"

"I'm probably worth, right now, more than any two men working for you, eh, Blevitt?"

"Indubitably."

"Eh?"

"Yes. Yes, you are, my boy. Why deny it?"

"But I only get the pay of one salesman, don't I?"

J. K. Blevitt nodded sympathetically.

"When I'm worth twice as much?"

J. K. Blevitt performed a secret little pantomime of a man testing the razor keenness of an ax preparatory to sinking said imaginary ax into the thick skull of Simms Daly, this for the benefit of Rudolph Reed, who acknowledged the comedy by the slightest flicker of an eyelash. Aloud Blevitt agreed: "You state the case precisely, Daly."

"Then," said Daly, "we come to the point!"

"Yes, Daly, we come to the point!" For the benefit of his friend and partner, J. K. Blevitt gave his imaginary ax a preliminary, imaginary flourish. He interrupted Simms Daly, who was about to go on. "We come to the point! Admirably put. And the point is, I see that you have discovered what I knew for a long time, Daly. You've found out you are worth far more money than the J. K. Blevitt company pays for your services."

The goat-getter nodded brightly.

"And, as I understand it, Daly, you are here now to inquire just what I am going to do about remedying this condition. In other words, you think you are entitled to a very substantial increase in pay?"

"Yes, Blevitt, but—"

Blevitt did not heed the interruption. "And you are just about to inquire what I am going to do about it? Now wait, Daly—" Blevitt held up his hand to prevent interruption. His suavity had been getting more sugared with every word. J. K. Blevitt was coming to his point, and his point was meant to be a crusher—nothing short of one neat, devastating chop of his imaginary ax that would drop the officially figurative head of Simms Daly into the basket, leaving on the face a look of deeply pained bewilderment. "Now, Daly, I am going to tell you exactly what I am going to do about this request of yours for bigger salary, and—"

"Hold on! Hold on, Blevitt! No, you got me wrong, old man."

"Ah, no, Daly, I'm sure I haven't got you wrong."

"But you have, Blevitt. I'm not asking you to raise my pay."

"You are not what?" Blevitt roared.

Rudolph Reed's lower jaw obscured his necktie, so far open was his mouth.

"No!" Daly cried. "Of course not! I wouldn't ask you to raise me, Blevitt! Why, I know as well as you do, old man, that the J. K. Blevitt Company can't afford to pay me what I'm worth. I know that! That's why I just dropped in here to tell you I am quitting the first of the year."

"You are—quitting?" Blevitt murmured feebly. "Pardon me, Daly, I'm getting a little deaf. Did you say—"

"Blevitt, I'm sorry. I'm really sorry!" Simms Daly cried contritely. "But can't you see, I owe it to myself? I've got to get all that I'm worth, everybody agrees on that, so I just got a half dozen fellows with capital to back me, and I am starting a box business of my own, beginning on January 1. That's what I wanted to tell you."

Simms Daly rose, leaned across the desk and seized the limp hand of J. K. Blevitt, pumping it heartily. He then snatched the limper hand of Rudolph Reed and pumped that. And as a final assurance that all was sweetness and light between them, he clapped J. K. Blevitt heartily on the shoulder and cried: "No hard feelings, eh? No? That's fine! Merry Christmas, Blevitt!"

Simms Daly vented his empty, jackass laugh and strode out of J. K. Blevitt's office, humming in his resonant barytone, on good terms with all the world, and best of all, on good terms with himself.

THE END



THE CUP OF LIFE

I LIFTED up my Cup of Life,
And begged of Wealth to fill it:
He smiled, and said: "Oh, foolish hope;
I never will fulfill it!"

I lifted up my Cup of Life,
And begged of Fame to fill it:
He scornful smiled, and said: "Vain child,
I do not choose to will it!"

I lifted up my Cup of Life,
And begged of Love to fill it:
And now it brims so overfull,
I cannot help but spill it.

Emma A. Lente.



The Dancing Doll

By **FRANK CONDON** and **CHARLTON L. EDHOLM**

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARGOT'S FAREWELL.

BEFORE they reached the hotel George directed the driver to stop.

"We'd better say good-by right here." He extended his hand to Harbison and his wife. Last of all he held the cool hand of Margot in both of his and then with a sudden impulse raised it to his lips.

"It would be taking a chance to have any one at the hotel see me," he continued. "You'll probably find no one around. Even the night clerk is apt to be asleep at this hour. Just the same, if any of Valdez's detectives happened to be around and saw us together they might follow you to the boat and make trouble."

"I guess you're right," replied Jim Harbison. "But I'll see that Margot gets safely aboard. I've got a pocketful of American greenbacks and I notice that these

coffee-colored South American cops are just as partial to them as the kind we have in New York."

"I can trust Margot to you?"

"Your wife is safe in my hands, George. Why, if I'd lose her, I'd miss the brightest star that ever came out of South America. And big profits for me! When you hear the whistle toot, you'll know that your wife is on her way to Broadway and glory."

George was half out of the car when Margot impulsively threw her arms about his neck and once more he felt her warm lips, but they were on his cheek, and he realized that it was an act of gratitude, not of passion. "Good-by," he said hoarsely. "Good-by, and good luck!"

George and Tina left the car just a few blocks from their own apartment and slipped through the deserted streets where even the earliest risers had not begun to show themselves.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for October 18.

In the sitting room which they shared between them, George sank down in a chair and let his head fall on his arms that rested upon the table before him.

He was tired clear through, disappointed and humiliated. Margot's unemotional good-by kiss had told him more decisively than words that he was not her husband, not her lover, but only her good friend. That was something! But not enough from a wife!

Tina stood behind his chair and let her fingers run through his dark hair, wishing that she might dare to stoop and kiss the locks that curled so slightly under her touch.

"Poor boy!" she murmured in a voice that was as tender as a mother's. "You are so tired and so unhappy! I would do anything in the world to comfort you!"

George had no words to answer her. He felt too sick and sore.

Tina's eyes brimmed with tears as she felt or imagined she felt him shrink from her touch.

"Don't worry, George. Things will come out all right. Margot will make a hit in New York and after a while she'll miss you and will coax for you to come to her."

George did not reply. He did not raise his head. Only his deep and labored breathing showed that he was suffering and could not be comforted.

"Things worked out fine!" continued Tina as if she were talking to a child. "Don't you see, the girl is safe now? Away from Valdez and out of reach of that beast who calls himself her guardian!"

"But she's gone!—She said good-by without any more feeling than if I had been old Gian' Bori or the pianist at the café. I'm nothing to her!"

"Don't say that! Of course, you're something to her! Why, she owes everything to you! When she comes to her senses she'll realize it!"

Silence.

Then Tina continued soothingly:

"You know, dear, some girls are like that. They can't show what they feel—why away down in her heart a girl may be just crazy with love and yet—and yet you may think by the way she acts that

she's cold and reserved—like Margot—or she may laugh and cut up like a wild creature—when her heart's just breaking. You never can tell about girls! They're like that!"

Her hand which stroked his hair trembled a little as she smoothed his dark curls, but George shook it off as he rose impetuously.

"Oh, it's hell, Tina! It's hell to care for anyone like that!"

"I know it is, boy! It's—it's something fierce—but listen! You're all tired and excited. Can't you settle down now and get a little sleep?"

"No, I can't sleep! My room seems like a jail. No, that isn't it. I've got her pictures all over the place and I can't bear to look at them. I don't know what I want to do. I'd like to get drunk!"

Tina threw open the door of her own room. "Come in here," she said. "It's cool here and—and there are no pictures!"

George glanced in at the room that looked so virginal in the cool light of the early morning, the little white bed, the floor bare except for a couple of small rugs, the gray walls.

Over the head of the bed, facing the door, was a small blue and white image of the Virgin, above a tiny font of holy water.

But Tina had not told the truth when she said there were no pictures in her room. On the little table beside a book or two, and a vase of flowers was a framed photograph of George. With a quick gesture she laid it flat and placed a book upon it.

"Come in, George," she said. "—Do you know, in all the time we've lived here you've never been inside my room?"

Too worn out to protest, George staggered in, gazing about the immaculate chamber with bloodshot eyes, and threw himself heavily on the bed.

In a few moments he was asleep.

Tina listened to his deep breathing for a little while, then assured that he had sunk into the stupor of exhaustion, she silently and swiftly slipped out of her tattered dress, the black and scarlet costume that had been ripped and clawed by brambles on the mountain trail, and tossed it into a drawer.

She kicked off her slippers and stepped into dainty mules of blue and white, then filling the basin with cold water she washed her face and neck and arms, glad of the refreshing chill.

Finally she slipped into a negligée of blue and white and seating herself before her dressing table, shook out her hair and began to brush the cloudy black masses.

But as she looked in the mirror she was not studying her own features, fine and spirited as those of a gypsy princess. She was looking at the reflection of George, who was stretched on her bed, his brows no longer knitted and his mouth no longer drawn in suffering, but relaxed in the blessing of sleep.

As she looked at him the girl was thinking of that other girl who had won this man so easily and as easily tossed him aside.

"I wonder!" mused Tina. "I wonder what I would have done? Suppose it was my act that had knocked over that theater manager! Suppose Mr. Harbison had said to me 'You're positively the world's best demon-dancer. You come to New York with me and I'll give you a thousand a week! And what's more I'll have your name in the biggest lights on Broadway! The whole town will be talking of Christina Bianca!' Suppose he'd said all that to me, instead of to her—"

Tina mused on the vision of glory for a moment while the brush caressed her black hair, then she said aloud: "'You go plumb to the devil, Mr. Harbison!' That's what I'd tell him!"

With difficulty the girl restrained her impulse to stroke the head that was dreaming on her pillow, but as she stared at it with her big black eyes full of tenderness, there was a sound at the street door.

Who could be trying to enter at that time of night?

CHAPTER XIX.

TINA'S WILES.

AS the girl strained her ears, listening to the ominous sounds without, she heard the low mutter of peremptory commands; then there were footsteps of men coming up stairs.

She hurried to the window. Two figures were standing by the opposite wall, looking toward her apartment.

Tina's eyes grew wide with apprehension and she ran into the sitting room—to listen at the hall door.

There were men—how many she did not know—moving about outside. She thought she could distinguish the clank of metal. There was a click as if a revolver was being cocked.

Swift as a darting swallow the girl snatched up George's cap and threw it back of a mirror.

She fled into her room and shook George by the shoulders.

"Quiet!" she whispered. "Not a word! There are men outside! Valdez's men!"

George was awake instantly, his jaw set, his hand instinctively reaching for his gun, eager to jump in and fight. But the girl cautioned him with finger on her lips.

"Not yet You've done enough fighting!"

Suddenly there was a sharp rap on the outer door; then a succession of knocks as if somebody were tapping the panel with a revolver butt.

"Who's there?" cried Tina, and she left George for a moment to throw back the covers of her bed.

"Who's there?" And as she called in tones of surprise she was backing George against the wall beside her bedroom door.

"Stay there! Don't make a sound!" she whispered and, as the knocking was repeated louder than ever, she ran to the hall door and opened it a crack.

Instantly it was forced open and three men had crowded into the room while a couple more could be seen in the corridor.

One was in uniform, a young, smartly-dressed police lieutenant, with a military mustache, black against his clear olive skin. He carried himself with the swaggering air of an army officer.

The others were in plain clothes, detectives of a nondescript appearance that would never have been picked out among the half caste population of Rio.

"What do you want?" asked Tina backing away from them.

The officer twisted his mustache and gazed at her with insolent admiration.

"We want that assassin! We want George Marchand! Which is his room?"

"That is his room." And as she pointed the two detectives sprang at the door, wrenched it open and rushed in.

"He's not there! George has not been home to-night!" cried Tina.

The detectives could be heard overhauling the room as if they expected to find the man hiding under the bed or behind the chairs.

They were cursing furiously. Perhaps to prove to themselves that they had no fear of "that vile assassin."

Lieutenant Rico stared suspiciously around the sitting room; then eyed Tina doubtfully.

But the girl clung to his arm in what seemed an impulse of panic. "Oh, don't let them hurt me," she cried. "You're a gentleman. Save me from those ruffians!"

"I won't let them hurt you," replied the officer with a chivalrous air. "It is only George that we want."

"Oh, I tell you he's not here! He's not been here all night. There was a row at the café and he must have been afraid to come home."

The detectives came out of George's room. "The brigand is not there," they said.

The officer glanced at the revolvers in their hands and smiled sardonically.

"Lucky for him! I see you were taking no chances!"

"Would you shoot him down without a chance to surrender?"

Tina stood before the officer with clasped hands and terror in her face.

The lieutenant threw out his chest a little as he replied:

"Not I. It would take more than a bandit like that to terrify me. These fellows would shoot him on sight, but I—I would just look him in the eye and subdue him. Even if I did not have a weapon I would subdue him."

"How brave you are!" exclaimed Tina. "A brave man is always cool in the face of danger."

The girl was so evidently impressed by his heroism that the lieutenant could not help feeling kindly toward her.

How these timid little creatures adored strong, determined men!

There was a pause. A moment of embarrassment as the officer searched those frightened black eyes that drooped before his frank appreciation.

"Must you be going now?" asked Tina shyly, breaking the silence.

The officer came to himself.

"As a matter of form you must permit us to search your room. He bowed with exaggerated gallantry. "A mere matter of form, I assure you!"

Tina's long eyelashes fluttered down on her cheeks to meet the mounting color as she spoke in frightened accents. "Must you? Must you go into my room? My bedroom?"

"I have orders to search the house," replied Lieutenant Rico. "But don't be frightened. I won't let my men in. I won't distress you!"

"You're kind! You're a gallant gentleman!" breathed Tina and she slipped back into her room, swinging the door against the wall where George was concealed, revolver in hand.

Holding the knob she said: "See for yourself. There is no one here!"

The officer stood in the doorway and swept the cloister-like bedchamber with a glance. His eyes rested upon the narrow white bed with the cover thrown back. He saw the image of the Virgin above it and hastily crossed himself.

Never in his career had the officer been nearer death than at that moment, for George's finger was on the trigger; in his eyes shone the fire of a man who was desperate with exhaustion and the strain of pursuit. If the lieutenant had looked behind that door it would have been the last act of his life.

Instead of that, Lieutenant Rico's eyes met those of Tina and he unconsciously gave his mustache a little twist.

"You'll pardon the intrusion, my dear young lady. Mere matter of form!" he murmured. "Naturally he would not be here, but—orders, you know."

And as he backed out of her bedroom the officer added: "I shall call at the café We shall become better acquainted, yes?"

Tina's only answer was a smile, but it ravished that susceptible heart.

A moment later the footsteps of the intruders clattered down stairs and out into the street.

CHAPTER XX.

VALDEZ ACTS.

WHAT would Pedro Valdez do about it? That was the question on the tongue of all Rio.

The politician had insulted a married woman, and the husband had knocked him down. It was a public beating—not a thing to be hushed up.

For the next few days the town was talking of nothing else and the newspapers kept the gossip going. The latest issues were in demand in every club and public bar in Rio.

The coffee drinkers on the Avenida drew their heads together over the tables as they read the headings.

Young bloods declared that George was right—that they, too, would have knocked down the big boss in such a case.

But the older men declared that Valdez was taking too much time. When *they* were young—and they twisted their white mustaches defiantly—such an attack on a leading politician would be instantly wiped out in blood. In those days an affair of honor was not allowed to grow cold—a blow, a challenge and at dawn the next morning—*crack-crack!* The pistols spoke the short deadly words of the code. An insult like that demanded nothing less than blood!

George, going about his affairs at the Café La Scala, no longer feared arrest. Brooding savagely over the loss of Margot, he was longing for a fight.

The one thing he dreaded was that he would be shot at or knifed in the back by some paid thug. He got into the habit of scrutinizing carefully all the strangers in the café. He had a terrible shock one night when he thought he recognized an old acquaintance from Bleecker Street, not one of the gang but a fellow who sometimes drove a car for them—but when he turned for

a second look at the man he had disappeared.

"I guess I just dreamed it," thought George. "What would Tony be doing in Rio?"

In those days George was the center of attention. The man who had defied the big boss. But he was no longer "the brigand, the vile assassin."

To Valdez's opponents he was a hero. To others he was the doomed man awaiting execution at the point of the Brazilian's sword or the muzzle of his duelling pistol.

For Pedro had a reputation for gallantry, a fighting Don Juan!

Meanwhile Valdez sulked in his villa. Though he spread threats of terrible vengeance abroad through the active tongues of his hangers-on, he did not take immediate action.

Perhaps he hoped that George would be frightened at the rumors of slaughter and sneak out of town. Perhaps he wished to conquer by scaring his enemy to death.

But his parasites returned to tell him that George only smiled at the tales of Valdez's skill with the sword and did not seem greatly worried when he heard that his enemy could shoot out a candle at forty paces.

Lieutenant Rico, whose order to arrest George had been revoked, spent much of his time hanging over Tina's desk. He declared that George was a terrible fighter with sword, knife and pistol, and had slain many men in duels in the streets of New York—to say nothing of the wild Indians who lurked about that city. He said this so often that he finally believed it and began to admire the man he had tried to arrest.

All this gave Valdez something to think about. He instructed his confidential agents to look up George's record in the United States—question every man in Rio who had ever been in New York.

He even thought of bribing George secretly to leave the country. It would be worth money to save his face that way. But somehow nothing came of this.

Reluctantly he prepared to fight.

It was Guy Dalby who finally goaded him to action. The song-and-dance man

had made such a nuisance of himself ever since the word of Margot's marriage had been spread that Valdez was tempted to throw him out bodily.

Guy loudly blamed Valdez for the girl's escape and when he ferreted out the truth that she had gone to New York under contract to dance on Broadway, he acted as if the Brazilian had been party to a fraud on her guardian.

"I know what's the matter! You're afraid! Otherwise you'd take it out of that low fellow, somehow. You'd have him in jail. Sell out his café! Make him pay damages!"

"You must be crazy!" retorted the enraged Valdez. "How can I sell his café? Gian' Bori is part owner. And *he* has friends in Rio."

"Well then, why don't you fight him? I say, are you really afraid of that beggar? Because if you *are*, I'll fight him myself."

Such taunts were not to be borne! They might cost him his leadership in Rio. Valdez flushed under his dark skin; his heavy lidded eyes flamed with resentment and he clenched his fists as he threw curses at Guy Dalby in English and Portuguese.

"I'll fight the scoundrel," he growled.

That same night two young men of the lounge-lizard type entered the Café La Scala and drew George into a quiet corner. They had the honor, they explained haughtily, of bearing a challenge from Señor Pedro Valdez.

There was only one alternative: if George would make a public apology, his insult might be overlooked. Otherwise, they desired to know the name of his seconds.

"You expect me to apologize?" cried George. "Ask pardon of that kidnaper—that thug?"

"Yes. An apology—here in the café before his friends—will avert bloodshed. Pedro Valdez is dangerous. I advise you to accept his generous offer."

"Valdez can go to hell with his generosity. He wants to see blood, does he? Fine! He'll see gallons of it! His own!"

One of the young sports bowed and presented his card. George read the name, "Carlos Pulcherio," and the address at the Jockey Club.

"I'll send my seconds to you in an hour," George said. "To-morrow morning I'll have the pleasure of letting daylight through your fat friend. Tell him to make his will."

The elegantly clad youths bowed with elaborate politeness and left the café as if they were afraid of touching something unclean.

Once outside they breathed more freely. "What a savage!" exclaimed Carlos Pulcherio. "These Americans of the north! Uncivilized!"

His companion assented. "Drinkers of blood! They are indeed savages."

But an hour later they were discussing the arrangements for the duel with one of their own countrymen. George had been able to find only one acquaintance who understood such matters, and that was Lieutenant Rico, the admirer of Tina.

That gentleman, when asked for advice, was delighted to be of service to Tina's supposed brother.

"Allow me to act as your second," he cried. "Forget that I took orders from Valdez to arrest you. In an affair of honor such things are overlooked. Valdez is not a personal friend of mine. No, he would not hold a grudge against me for this. It is quite impersonal." And he added, with a smile: "If you kill Valdez, I need not fear him; if he kills you, he will be pleased. Either way, I have the pleasure of serving you without danger to myself."

But Tina, when she heard of what was planned, did not show such confidence. "Don't trust that man too far," she warned that night in their sitting room. "Make sure that your gun is properly loaded; don't let them slip blanks into your gat, or do you dirt some other way."

"Why? Do you think your friend Lieutenant Rico would double-cross me?"

"No—not that. He's straight—but he's not very bright."

She pondered for a moment, then added: "But maybe he won't be so dumb when he's dealing with men. Just the same, you watch out."

"I'll take care they don't put one over on me. And one more thing."

"Yes, George?"

"If I'm not so lucky—if I don't come back—I want you to have all I've got. Margot is taken care of by her contract. I wrote her a letter and left it with Gian' Bori to mail to-morrow. She'll understand."

"You want me to have your property? In case—"

"Sure—you're my pal. I wrote it down on a paper and had old Bori witness it."

But Tina suddenly began to cry. Her body shook with sobs.

"Oh, George! It gives me the willies to hear you've made your will. Why did you do it? *Why?* I don't want your damned old money!"

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO SHOTS.

GEORGE patted the shoulder of the weeping girl. Her tears flowed for a while, then suddenly Tina threw back her head and brushed her hands across her eyes.

"Forget it, kid," she said. "That will, I mean."

"Why?"

"Because there's only one thing to think of. Plug him!"

The girl fumbled at a thin silken cord about her slender neck and drew a small object from the warmth of her breast.

"Here! Wear this!" she exclaimed. "This was blessed by a priest. Not by one of these padres, but by a real priest at home—Father Luisi."

George received the amulet gravely. As she hung it about his neck, her hand touched his throat and the contact tingled. She was vibrant with pent-up emotion.

"Good night, Tina. I've got to sleep for a while—steady my nerves."

"Good night, boy—good night!"

She was at the door of her room when suddenly she turned and ran back.

"Kiss me good night, George." Her arms were about his neck. "No—don't look so serious! Smile! I'm not kissing you good-by. I'm kissing you for luck."

And Tina was smiling as their lips met for the first time.

But once behind her own door the smile had vanished. She was on her knees, turning a blanched, drawn face imploringly to the little image of the Virgin.

"Protect him!" she whispered in agonized prayer. "Don't let him get bumped off! *Madre di Dio*, keep an eye on George and don't let that dirty bum croak him!" She stayed on her knees through the night until the gray that heralds the dawn stole through the shutters.

Before daybreak Tina slipped into George's room on tiptoe. He was fast asleep and his face was as placid as if no worry about the outcome of the duel had ever troubled his dreams.

Tina glanced about the room as she touched him on the shoulder. The walls were bare. The photographs of Margot had all been taken down and put out of sight. Tina wondered why. Was it because he found it too painful to look at them, or—she scarcely dared to hope—was he beginning to care less for that beautiful blonde with a heart as cool as the northland of her birth?

George awoke at her touch, and while Tina made coffee in the sitting room she could hear him splashing away in cold water she had drawn for him, and presently he came out smiling and whistling, his hair all rumpled from the bath.

The coffee was ready, but George did not sit down to drink it. Instead he walked up and down the room sipping the hot brew with boyish impatience.

"One would think you were going to a picnic," said Tina with a forced smile.

"It's a picnic for me, but not for Valdez. I'll be back again in a couple of hours, and then our troubles will be over."

She looked at him with wide, questioning eyes.

"Tell me one thing—are you going to shoot to kill?" asked Tina breathlessly.

"No. I've got it all figured out. That might mean more trouble. I'll put a bullet through his arm and let it go at that."

There was the sound of a motor in the street.

"Here's Rico now with the car," said George. "Good-by, kid—I'll see you later."

"Good luck, boy! Plug him for me!"

He was gone.

Tina stood at the window looking through the Venetian blinds, and saw the boy she had prayed for leap into the car between Lieutenant Rico and another officer. His manner was as jaunty and gay as if they were going off for a fishing trip. He glanced up, waved carelessly to the girlish figure in the window, then turned to talk to his two companions.

Tina strained her eyes to follow it as the motor slipped away in the gray light; then she dragged her feet wearily to her bedroom as if she were being led to execution.

Once more she fell on her knees before the Virgin and prayed silently.

The meeting place was a clearing on the hilltop not far from Valdez's country house, the villa where the party had been given. Although George and his friends had much farther to go, they were first on the ground. When Valdez did arrive with his seconds and a gray bearded surgeon carrying a case of instruments, he looked surly and heavy, as if he had quieted his nerves with alcohol or some drug.

The politician was very imposing in frock coat and silk hat, and the young men who seconded him were fastidiously dressed.

While the seconds were measuring off the ground the politician carefully laid aside his coat and vest, folded them, and placed his high hat on the pile of garments. Then he stood with his arms crossed like the hero of a melodrama scowling at George.

After a few moments' consultation, Rico returned to George and said in an undertone:

"I've been told that you have one more chance to apologize. Even now if you wish to ask pardon before these gentlemen, Señor Valdez will let the matter drop."

"We're wasting time," said George. "When does the shooting begin?"

The pistols were not the sort of arms George was accustomed to, but heavy dueling weapons, firing only one shot. They were loaded with great formality by the seconds, and the choice was determined by lot.

As he took his position in the field covered by dewy grass, George could feel the cool morning breeze from the sea blow through his light shirt and caress his body. From where he stood there was a long, sweeping vista over the sleeping city; the broad harbor and the glory of the sea at dawn. A full throated chorus of birds was jubilantly greeting the new day from the tree tops. Their joyous music seemed to echo back from the sky, tinted like a pearl and rosy in the east.

How beautiful the world was! Every sunrise was a fresh miracle!

And, waiting for the second's command to fire, George felt a little swift pang, a feeling something like terror at the thought that when the sun did rise he might not be alive to see it.

His jauntiness had not been just a pose. Until that moment it had actually not occurred to him that a bullet from Valdez might strike him dead.

From life to death in a single second! George saw it in his mind's eye as a bird in careless flight through the air. Suddenly there is a report, a scattering of feathers, and the creature that was so full of life and joy and energy drops, a limp, bedraggled thing—dead!

In the instant that George realized that he was facing death, things seemed suddenly to take new values. Life itself, the mere fact of existence, seemed tremendously precious just then.

Before that he had simply taken it for granted, just as he had taken for granted the best things of life, his youth, his strength, his friends, the devotion of the best little friend of all—Tina!

Tina! What a plucky little kid she was, and what a friend! Time and again she had stood by him and pulled him out of one scrape after another. Why, even this very morning she had drawn his bath and made his coffee and sent him on his way with crisp words of courage.

She had smiled, but all of a sudden he realized that she must have been holding back her tears. She had given him her amulet. And at this moment, no doubt, she was praying for his safety.

She loved him!

The thought struck him like a blow. Tina loved him! And he was facing death, within a second, with his mind dwelling on that black eyed, gypsylike little pal, instead of Margot.

It was of Tina that he thought when he was about to die! It must be Tina that he loved! And he could never tell her! He was certain now that in Valdez's gun there was a bullet with his name written on it.

But that certainty that came with lightning speed did not disturb his aim. At the word he raised his weapon and fired swiftly.

The two shots rang out as one.

Valdez, with a scream of rage, staggered back, clutching his left arm. The gush of blood had dyed his shirt sleeve a bright red.

But George had fallen forward and lay still with a bullet through his chest.

At the same moment, with her face turned up to the Virgin, Tina was crying piteously: "Oh, don't let him die! Oh, don't let him die!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR A PURPOSE!

IT was just an hour after George had waved a jaunty good-by to Tina. His seconds were on their way back to the city with the stern, pale faces of men who had just looked at death. Lieutenant Rico wondered how he could break the news to George's sister.

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that it was impossible. It would be like striking that lovely girl a blow in the face.

How could he stand before her and tell her that he had seen her brother shot down! That the doctor had shaken his head after just one glance! That George was dead!

Impossible! He could not say such things to the girl he had gayly flirted with night after night at the café. Lieutenant Rico had courage of a sort, but not that sort. He ordered the car driven to the Café La Scala, and although the place was not open

at that hour in the morning he battered on the door until Pierre Vigney, the old pianist, appeared with rumpled hair and thrust an angry face through the crack of the door.

"Where is Gian' Bori?" asked Lieutenant Rico. "I must speak to him at once."

"He's at home in bed where he belongs," growled the musician. "What do you want to see him about at this time of the day?"

"It's about his partner."

"George? Has anything happened to George?"

"Dead! Shot through the chest!"

Pierre Vigney grasped the doorjamb to steady himself against the shock.

"Impossible! George dead!"

"Shot in a duel by Valdez."

"Ah, that duel! So it has come off, and our poor boy is murdered!"

"Why do you say murdered? Valdez was in danger, too. In fact, he was shot through the arm. It was a fair fight—George was not murdered! He was slain on the field of honor. Everything was perfectly correct," interrupted Captain Reyes, the other second, with a lofty air.

"Oh, yes, everything was quite according to the rules," Lieutenant Rico assured the old man. He seemed to feel that no one could have any complaints to make after that statement. "I give you my word, everything was perfectly correct."

"Correct! Bah! A-ah, you assassins! You are all assassins down here in this barbarous country. What will Gian' Bori say?" The old musician's voice trembled. "Bori thought of him as a son—almost. And his wife? That adorable girl, like a little fairy, who is waiting for him in America! And his poor sister, what will she say?"

"It is about his sister that I want to talk to you." Lieutenant Rico's dark eyes were troubled. "Some one else must break the news to her. I cannot face her."

"I can well believe that!" exclaimed the old man fiercely. "Any one who had a hand in that crime would not care to face her."

"Why do you call it a crime, old man?"

demanded Captain Reyes. "I tell you it was an affair of honor!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Pierre Vigney bitterly. "If there was any honor in the affair Pedro Valdez would not be involved in it. I saw how it all began; I saw how Valdez insulted our lovely Margot. When George knocked him down he should have killed him outright—that would have been just!"

Pierre Vigney nodded his gray head mournfully like a philosopher who has seen a lifetime of suffering, then added: "Such is life! The wicked man, the aggressor, triumphs! The just man is slain! Life is like that."

The seconds turned to go. "We've done our duty," said Lieutenant Rico. "It was very painful. Will you tell his sister that? Tell her she has our sympathy—from the heart."

And he placed his hand on his chest with a theatrical gesture.

Pierre Vigney set out on his errand. It was the most painful journey in his long and unhappy life, the few short blocks that he had to walk before reaching Tina's apartment. His feet seemed to cling to the sidewalk as if they were held down by chains.

Laboriously he climbed the stairs to her room and tapped feebly on the door. Tina opened it, pale and haggard, and at the sight of the wretched face and bowed shoulders of her friend she knew all that he had to say.

"You've come about George?" she whispered through dry lips from which all the blood had fled.

The old man nodded mournfully, and the tears rolled down his withered cheeks.

Tina clutched her breast with both hands.

"Is he badly hurt?" she stammered.
"Killed!"

With a despairing moan the girl dropped as if a bullet had struck her. The old man was forced to lift her and stagger painfully under the inert body.

When he laid her on the bed, Pierre Vigney was horrified. Her face was so ghastly, her breathing so spasmodic! It appeared that she was dying before his eyes.

Frantically he hunted for brandy to force down her throat, for cold water to bathe her forehead, and finally he ran out to find a doctor.

When, after a long search, he did succeed in bringing a physician to the apartment, it looked as if help had come too late. The girl lay there like a corpse.

The doctor worked over her with restoratives, but his efforts only caused her to open her eyes feebly like a dying woman.

They sent for Gian' Bori and his wife, who declared that she would sit at the girl's bedside until she was cured. But even her care was not enough. It was necessary to find a trained nurse as well, and for days and weeks the girl's life hung in the balance.

"It is nothing unusual," declared the physician, "for a girl with a high strung, nervous temperament to be prostrated by such a shock as the news of her brother's death."

While Tina's life hung in the balance Gian' Bori and his wife did not leave the apartment. They directed Pierre Vigney to arrange for the burial of their murdered son.

But the old man returned from an interview with Valdez's secretary, and brought the word that the body had been given a Christian burial.

The politician himself was not to be found. The bullet in his arm had confined him to his bed. But the secretary had been courteous and expressed regret at the sad occurrence. His employer, so he said, was remorseful at the outcome of the duel, and had paid the priest and the undertaker.

Pierre Vigney had even visited the cemetery and seen the fresh grave.

It was a high-handed proceeding. Gian' Bori stormed and raged at this fresh outrage. But what could he do? The boy was dead! Perhaps, after all, Valdez had meant well in having him buried.

He could only show his grief by ordering a handsome monument to be placed over the new grave. And he spent all the affection that he felt for George in devoting himself to Tina's recovery.

It was a month before the girl was able to leave the apartment and drive to the cemetery, where she laid a wreath on the stone that Bori had placed there. Pale and broken in spirit, with little trace of the former madcap dancer, she returned listlessly to the house, and when Gian' Bori and his wife begged her to come and live with them she refused like one who has no comfort in life.

"No, no—I can't stay on in Rio," she said. "The place is hateful to me. Everything I see reminds me of George, and I can't stand it!"

"What will you do, then?"

"I want to go back to New York. I have friends there. You did not know it, but I have an old father. Perhaps when I am home again it will be easier to forget."

Gian' Bori dealt most generously with the girl in the settlement of George's estate. He did not seriously oppose her return to her home when he was once convinced that she could never be happy in Rio.

And thus it came about that Tina took passage for New York two months after the duel, while the lover she mourned as dead was fighting his way to recovery on a plantation in the jungle.

He was being nursed back to health by the best physician that Valdez could pay for. Everything that money could buy was used to save his life.

Nevertheless, he was a prisoner. He was a captive, kept by Pedro Valdez for a purpose.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A PERFECT REVENGE.

IT was not because Pedro Valdez had suddenly grown tender-hearted that he was trying to nurse his enemy back to life. On the contrary, he was so enraged by the wound in his arm that he would have been callous enough to leave the body where it fell.

But the surgeon, Dr. Ribiera, returned to the fallen man after the arm had been bandaged, to assure himself that the victim was really dead.

To his astonishment, he found the heart fluttering feebly, no more than the faintest spark of life, but that was enough. With the instinct of a healer, he worked with all his skill to snatch the dying man from the jaws of death.

George's seconds had already gone away in the car. The surgeon had told them to notify the relatives and that he would arrange to have the body removed. But when he found that there was still hope he insisted on carrying George to the nearest house, and that was the villa of Pedro Valdez.

"Why should I help you save the life of that scoundrel?" snarled the politician. "That anarchist—the scum that tried to assassinate me!"

"It would be nothing less than murder to do otherwise," protested the doctor. "You are a man of honor, a gentleman, not a murderer!"

"All right," was the grudging response. "Bring him along and do as you think best. But it would give me greater pleasure to put my pistol to his head and blow out his brains."

An hour later Valdez was in bed trying to restore his strength with morning chocolate, when Guy Dalby was announced. He had rushed up from the city breathless with important news.

"Oh, I say!" he exclaimed as he saw the bandaged arm resting stiffly on a pillow. "The beggar plugged you! Did you return the compliment?"

Valdez scowled at his visitor over his chocolate.

"I killed the blackguard! He may have crippled me for life—why, I may even lose my arm—but I killed him; at least I hope I did!"

"You killed him! Oh, I say, that spoils everything!"

"I'm not sure whether he'll pull through. The doctor hopes to save him, but I don't think he's worth the trouble."

"I want to see him get well," declared Guy with decision.

"You! You want him to live! I thought you hated him as much as I do."

"I want him to live because his troubles are just beginning. Listen, Valdez,

We've got his record. That beggar is wanted in New York for murder."

The politician started so violently that he almost upset his cup. The movement jarred his wounded arm and made him cry out in agony. Then he stared at Dalby with bloodshot eyes.

"Is it true? You're not drunk—or crazy?"

"It's true, old dear! The detectives have been questioning every stranger in the city about George Marchand. They rounded up an immigrant from New York, an Italian who claimed to be a chauffeur, a rather fishy sort, I think, but he says he knows all about George Marchand. His real name is George Marcanda, and this fellow describes him perfectly, even to the scar on his cheek. He recognized George in the Café La Scala."

"So I've been fighting a duel with a criminal!" snapped Valdez, flushing with rage.

"Yes. He got away from New York after killing a policeman. One of his confederates was caught and executed. He was a notorious gangster. Happy George, they called him."

"If I'd known that before, I wouldn't be sitting here with my arm in a sling," growled Valdez. "And that fellow would have been in a cell, where he belongs."

"Quite so. You could have honorably refused to fight a man of that sort—a fugitive from justice! You could have held him in jail for extradition."

"It may not be too late yet. If Dr. Ribiera pulls him through, we can cable to New York, and they will send an officer to take him back. It would be a happy day for me if I could hear that he was executed."

But Guy Dalby tapped his wrist with a forefinger. "I have a better plan than that, old dear," he said. "There is a reward offered for this murderer. It seems that some millionaire in New York was a friend of the bobby who was killed. The reward is quite handsome—ten thousand dollars!"

"Well, what about it?"

"Just this. Suppose I go to New York and get all the facts in the case. Then I

can inform the police and claim the reward. You put up my traveling expenses and we'll split fifty-fifty."

Valdez made a magnificent gesture.

"The money is nothing to me! What I want is to see this brigand executed. To think that I've been struck in the face and shot by a common criminal!"

"To say nothing of being cheated out of the girl you want," added Guy Dalby.

"You are right!" Valdez snarled. "I want to see that scoundrel suffer!"

"I'm with you on that. At the same time, that reward means something to me, even if it's just small change to you. If we don't handle this right, somebody else—that Italian who knows him—may step in and claim the reward. Now, here's a plan that's perfectly topping. Who knows that George is still alive?"

"Only the doctor and my seconds—all trustworthy men. The report has been spread that he was killed."

"Righto! That makes it very simple. Let every one believe that George was killed. Say that you've had him buried. A man of your power can fix the details, fake a death certificate, and bribe the undertaker. You can even have a fresh grave made in the cemetery for a perfect alibi. Meanwhile keep George out of sight until I can go to New York and claim that ten thousand dollars reward."

Valdez smiled with evil pleasure. The scheming and deception that was required added a certain zest to his revenge.

"There is one little detail that you have forgotten, my dear friend," he suggested. "It will be the finishing touch to our little plot!"

"Let's hear it."

"I will advance you the passage money to New York. I will let you keep the entire reward, the whole ten thousand dollars. In return for this you will see to it that George is taken back to be executed."

"Yes, yes—that's the agreement."

"And in addition you will bring back your lovely ward. I am very anxious that before George goes to his death he shall know that I have possessed Margot. What do you think of my plan, Dalby?"

Guy extended his hand. "It's topping, old boy! We'll make that fellow squirm! If your surgeon can only keep him alive, we'll both even up our old scores."

Meanwhile, in a shabby bedroom that had once been used by a servant, George lay, gasping feebly. Only his painful breathing told that he was alive, for his face was deathly pale and he had not recovered consciousness.

The doctor shook his head despairingly more than once during that day, while he wrestled for the life of George Marcanda. Time and again he thought that the fight was lost, but every time the stubborn vitality of the patient pulled him through.

Dr. Ribiera was a devout man, a good Catholic, and a believer in miracles. His scientific training had not shaken his faith in divine intervention.

When he saw the amulet that Tina had hung about George's neck he wondered whether this young man's life was not spared by some power beyond the realm of science.

"By rights the bullet should have killed him," he murmured. "Perhaps some woman who loves him is praying for him, and God is listening to her prayers." And the good doctor made the sign of the cross.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WORKING OF THE PLAN.

FOR weeks, while George wrestled with death, he was kept out of sight in Valdez's house. Only Dr. Ribiera was permitted to see him and that good man was given no hint of the revenge that Pedro Valdez was planning against his patient.

On the contrary, when the doctor informed Valdez that George was recovering more slowly because he worried at getting no news from his friends, the politician invented some messages from Gian' Bori, from Tina and even from Margot.

They were reassuring messages that the sick man was too feeble to analyze very carefully. Under their false hope he began to gain so that in answer to Valdez's question the doctor announced that George would be able to travel soon.

"I have no more hate for that young man," Valdez assured the doctor with an oily smile. "For though my arm still gives me great pain—yes, even though you tell me that it will always be weak and stiff—yet I do not hate him!"

"You are a good Christian, Señor Valdez," and the surgeon made the sign of the cross. "Our Lord teaches us to forgive our enemies."

Valdez smiled at the doctor's simplicity and continued: "It is my plan to take the young man to one of my estates. The change of air, the quiet life on a coffee plantation will do him good."

"An excellent idea!" agreed the doctor.

"And you shall go along, my worthy friend. You will be paid well for your time and your only duty will be to see that the young man is completely restored." Valdez dismissed the surgeon with a lordly gesture and turned to his correspondence.

Guy Dalby had reported from New York and his plans seemed to be working out as he desired.

Still there was a certain vagueness about Dalby's letter. Some of the sentences were so rambling that the politician wondered whether the man who wrote that letter had been quite sober.

But he gathered that there was a reward offered for George Marcanda and that when the time was ripe Guy Dalby would claim it. Meanwhile, a few hundred dollars would be welcome.

Of Margot, little was said in the letter. It seemed that Harbison had taken her out of the city, probably to some place where she could rehearse for the act that was to startle Broadway. Dalby had not seen her.

Valdez smiled as he thought of the little surprise he had for both Guy and Margot. And most of all, for George. This was his surprise:

The marriage that had been made the pretext for a duel instead of summary jail proceedings was no more than a fraud. Valdez had decided to search the records right after George's departure and then had followed a long interview and a very painful one for the official who performed the ceremony.

That tricky old Aguirre had been turned

inside out like a sack under the searching questions of the political boss. He had been forced to admit that the legal forms had not been complied with. That he had taken money to doctor the records and fake certain documents.

Under the bullying of Valdez, the old man crumpled up and cried like a baby. He was finally released, pallid and trembling, glad to escape losing his position and to keep out of jail.

The price of his freedom was the sworn statement that the marriage was no marriage at all, but a plot with intent to deceive and defraud.

"This will be my little present to George," muttered Valdez with a smile. "It will cheer him on his way to execution."

It was with difficulty that the politician had restrained himself from going into George's room to gloat over his helplessness, but he took a savage pleasure in having Dr. Ribiera recite the details of the boy's sufferings and his painful convalescence.

He liked to imagine how the spasms would shoot through George's body as he breathed with that bullet-torn lung.

Every time his own stiff arm gave him a twinge, Valdez would think of the suffering that his enemy was feeling at that moment. And he rejoiced at the still greater suffering that would follow when his rival would be handed over to be executed.

He had learned that the legal execution in New York was not shooting, not beheading, not the garrote, but electrocution. He thought it must be very painful.

He even experimented with an electrical machine that gave slight shocks and would hold on to the handles until it would seem that his wrists would swell and burst. Then he would try to imagine how a man would suffer to endure that agony until death.

He hoped that Dr. Ribiera would make the patient strong and vigorous so that the torture would last a long time.

So when George was finally loaded into an automobile one night and sent across the mountains under the doctor's care, it was as a steer that is to be fattened for the butcher.

George was too weak to protest. He was not able to stand and the jolting of the car gave him a great deal of pain, but the doctor told him again and again of his rival's kindness and his forgiving spirit until George almost believed that a miracle had happened in the soul of his enemy.

Then he would have a vision of Pedro Valdez, like a moving picture, the heavy face, the pouches under the thick-lidded eyes, the insolence of the sensual mouth under its long mustache, and he would wonder how Dr. Ribiera could be victimized by such a man.

At the end of the motor highway, the doctor and patient were forced to continue their journey over rough mountain roads in an ox cart.

It was a primitive affair with two enormous wooden wheels that screamed on their axles like souls in purgatory.

Dr. Ribiera was horrified. He had not realized that they would have any hardships on the trip. But it was too late to turn back. The best he could do was to direct the driver to proceed very cautiously and to make long halts as they journeyed through the primeval jungle.

From day to day the road became less traveled, the huts of the natives or peons were farther and farther apart and the unbroken mass of the tropical forest seemed to close in upon them like a sea of heavy, poisonous green.

It was not until the end of the sixth day that they reached the coffee plantation, one of the most remote of Valdez's estates.

There they were received by the foreman, a dusky giant, part Portuguese, part negro, who was reputed to be an illegitimate half brother of his employer.

Manoel received them with a meaning smile. He had received complete instructions from his half brother and knew what was expected.

The guests were to be given a small house by themselves, furnished with provisions and other supplies and were to be kept *incommunicado*.

George was not to be allowed to escape, and Manoel thought he could manage that. No peons ever escaped from the plantation that *he* managed.

Outwardly he resembled the serfs who worked for him. He wore dirty cotton trousers, a ragged shirt that exposed his chest with its growth of hair, and his bare feet were protected with primitive sandals.

But in one or two details he differed from the peons. From a cartridge belt hung a heavy .44. A quirt always dangled from his wrist and wherever he went he carried a carbine, slung from his saddle when he rode and laid across his knees when he was sitting down.

Those weapons, the only ones on the estate, represented the law of that clearing in the jungle.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN THE TROPIC NIGHT.

AT first Manoel treated George and the doctor with a careless good nature.

They were provided with quarters of their own, a primitive hut near the ranch house, and supplied with food.

The strangers were something to break the monotony of life on the plantation, and as long as the novelty lasted, the manager was willing to drink fiery spirits with them, play cards and otherwise condescend to something approaching friendliness.

But it seemed like the playfulness of a bear, an untamed gigantic brute who had them in his power. He was a savage who might turn on them to rend and slay without notice.

As George recovered his strength under Dr. Ribiera's care, the half-caste put more contempt into his familiarity and less bluff sportiveness.

Manoel would address him by nicknames that might be either meant as insults or merely facetiousness. He would deal him heavy slaps on the shoulder—that might be meant cordially but that might be taken as real blows, for Manoel had muscles like a buffalo.

Sometimes he did not send food to the hut—forgot it on purpose. Once he sent his house boy with a jar of drinking water that was unspeakably filthy—a specimen of his grim humor.

For some time George did not guess the

cause of this needless brutality. He wondered whether Manoel had been instructed by his half brother to make their life miserable by a series of petty injuries and insults.

It was Dr. Ribiera who enlightened him, "It's that girl, Rosita, who is causing all the trouble, my friend."

"Rosita? That Indian girl that Manoel is fond of?"

"She's not exactly Indian. She is a mixture of the Brazilian jungle, native, negro, Portuguese. You would do well to treat her with great diplomacy."

George flushed. "I've hardly looked at Manoel's woman. Is the filthy brute jealous? Why, I wouldn't touch the creature."

"That's it. You show too plainly that you regard her as dirt under your feet."

"What else is she?"

"A woman!" The doctor smiled shrewdly. "In this little kingdom in the wilderness Rosita is a du Barry, a Pompadour. She can make or break any one who crosses her."

"All right. I'll be civil to Manoel's coffee-colored favorite."

"Do. But for heaven's sake be careful not to overdo it. If the savage who fondles her should regard you as a rival, it would be sudden death for both of us."

George laughed, but he was a bit uneasy nevertheless. It was a difficult course to steer and he found it so as soon as he began to show the slightest friendliness to the dusky charmer.

When he touched his cap and bade her good morning in the clearing before the ranch house, Rosita threw him a languorous glance from her great melting eyes, and her lips parted to show the whiteness of her teeth.

A little later she took occasion to pass the shady spot where he was sitting and once more that look of invitation was flung over her shoulder.

She paused for a moment to see if he would respond, and when she moved on, a purple flower was lying on the ground where she had stood.

George had merely nodded at the second encounter, nodded a little curtly, for he felt a sudden terror of the girl.

Rosita was not ugly at all. Now that their eyes had met and he had seen the lure that lighted from under her drooping eyelashes, he realized with a little shock that Rosita was a beauty, a savage creature, no doubt, but possessed of a violent and sensual beauty like that flower with the heavy petals that she had let fall.

After a time George rose and strolled carelessly across the cleared space picking up the flower as he passed it.

It was heavy. The petals were fleshy, and its heart seemed to be cloyed with rank honey. A sweet odor came from its depths, perfume so overpowering as to be almost repellant.

George examined the tropical flower carefully. He had never seen one just like it before. He held it to his nostrils for a moment, then stuck it in his belt and moved on.

That same evening George caught a glimpse of the girl as she sat before the ranch house, nestling in the curve of Manoel's burly arm. Even while her lover was in the act of caressing her, Rosita managed to flash a signal to this white man, her latest caprice. George quickened his steps to avoid a scene.

He played cards with Dr. Ribiera until late that night.

The heat was intense and the two friends retired to their hammocks, hoping that they had induced a drowsiness by their late hours that would send them to sleep in spite of the oppressive heat and the attacks of mosquitos.

Dr. Ribiera was lucky. He managed to drop off to sleep, but George tossed and rolled until the hammock swayed under him and his single garment was wringing with sweat.

His mind had been busied with thoughts of Tina. More and more her image, so gay and provocative, so daring and tender at once, had filled his waking hours and his dreams.

Several times there had been messengers from Rio, ragged peons in charge of ox carts loaded with supplies. George had inquired whether any of these had brought letters from his friends.

Manoel had grinned carelessly and re-

plied that there were no letters, but that his brother Pedro had sent warm regards to his guest and assurances that his friends in Rio were well and happy—that they looked forward to George's return.

To Dr. Ribiera this sounded perfectly satisfactory and when George confided his doubts and anxieties to the physician he was promptly reassured. If his friends did not write, well—the doctor shrugged and threw out his hands!—It was because there was nothing to write about! Why worry? As soon as he was well enough, Pedro would return his guest to Rio. The duel and all other unpleasantness would be forgotten.

So argued the confiding and generous-hearted Dr. Ribiera, a man of such gentleness and innate goodness that he could hardly imagine the depths of evil in other souls.

But George had no such childlike faith. As on many nights before, he lay awake this torrid night and wondered about Tina and Margot.

Margot was in New York long before this. Was her name already shining in lights on Broadway? Then Tina! His mind came back to her again and again. When would he see her to tell her that he had discovered it was she and no other that he loved?

Finally, unable to endure any more, he sat up, touched the earthen floor with his bare feet and slid quietly out of the hut into the brilliance of the tropical moonlight.

Not a light burned in all the plantation; only the radiance of the full moon lighted his path. It glinted from the leaves of the coffee bushes. It bathed the tops of the huge forest trees and cast profound inky shadows beneath their masses of foliage.

The silence was broken only by the indescribable calls and twitterings of small creatures of the night, and by the raucous breathing from the house where Manoel slept.

From the ravine that lay in the direction opposite to the ranch house, came the plash and gurgle of water. George turned and followed the trail to the stream.

After a plunge in the cooling waters he might be able to sleep!

As he cautiously felt his way down the slippery path the breath from the undergrowth filled his lungs with a warm sickly whiff of a hothouse.

It was full of mysterious strange odors, perfumes of flowers that might be as poisonous as they were sweet; the odor of decaying leaves, and of wet moss; a strange mingling of the scents that betokened life and death in fevered, riotous contact.

Leaves and twigs brushed against his face, a creeper caught his leg and he could hear a snake slither away at his approach. Ferns brushed against his knees as he drew near to the bank of the stream.

When he paused ankle deep in the rivulet, there was a swift stirring in the bushes as if a wild animal had been startled at his intrusion.

Without other warning, George struggled in the sudden embrace of two warm clinging arms and a body that clung to him as a python winds about its prey.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"JUST ONE LASH!"

HOT lips forced themselves upon his mouth and clung.

George could feel the rise and fall of her bosom as the girl, absolutely invisible in that forest darkness, held him to her with all the abandon of her unchecked emotions.

For a second his own young blood answered her, his heart beat in rhythm to her own and he was on the point of yielding.

Then something, pride of race, the balance of reason that civilization brings to bear against the clamor of the senses, made him resist.

Or perhaps it was something more personal, the thought of that other girl—a thought that made these fierce embraces appear merely bestial.

With a sudden angry movement, George exerted all his strength and thrust her from him. She was hurled headlong to the ground and sprang up, a quivering passionate wild thing.

"What the devil are you up to? Who are you?"

"*You!*—you can ask me that! After—

after wearing my flower?" Her voice came plaintive and charged with passion from the darkness.

"Rosita!"

George felt a chill of horror at what he had escaped. He was in no less danger even now. If Manoel should find him in the forest with his sweetheart, no vengeance would be too terrible. And Manoel carried the only weapons on the estate. Power of life and death was his!

If George had cared for the girl—if he had even been inflamed by her ardent advances, he might have taken the risk of death by torture. But Rosita, with all of her physical allure, was nothing to him.

And for that reason the very violence of her onslaught turned his indifference to loathing.

"Keep off!" he commanded in a sharp whisper.

He dared not raise his voice for fear of bringing the little community down upon them in alarm.

"Don't touch me! Keep off!"

She was approaching him on her knees, trying to draw him down to her.

Then with a sudden return of prudence he bent low and whispered in her ear. "Not now, my beautiful Rosita! Manoel is awake! I heard him stirring! Another time!" And he had fled up the trail to his hut.

George slept no more that night. He lay awake, tortured by the heat, the singing insects and the thought of what might result from this encounter.

He made up his mind to escape from the plantation as soon as possible. The danger of finding his way through the jungle would be great; the risks from wild animals, from poisonous snakes and insects, from hunger and exhaustion, and the pursuit of Manoel.

But to stay here subject to the caprice of Rosita, who was the object of that giant savage's affections; that meant certain death.

He would escape from the plantation the very next night. Somehow he would secure food and perhaps a revolver. But one way or another he must escape. and soon!

The next morning Rosita saw him from a distance and turned her back. Her manner was sullen and angry and George realized that she had found Manoel asleep on her return to the house. She had seen through his ruse and was furious.

Worried at the premonition of impending disaster, George retired to his hut. He crawled into his hammock and tried to get some sleep. He suffered from a slight fever and the sight of food nauseated him.

"Come on, my dear friend," urged Dr. Ribiera about mid-day. "This will do you good! See, they've sent us a stew of rice and chicken from the ranch house."

But George shook his head and the doctor mixed him up something from his medicine case instead.

Dr. Ribiera smacked his lips over the unusual luxury of chicken and rice stewed with peppers, and ate greedily.

In an hour he was dead.

The end had come so suddenly, a violent attack of cramps followed by convulsions of the final agony, that George did not have time to call for assistance.

He stared at his friend's body with horror.

Suspicion—more than suspicion, a certainty of what had happened, dawned upon him.

Picking up the dish with the remains of the chicken stew he threw it into the courtyard and instantly dogs were fighting over the bones. The largest and greediest of the curs was the one who first showed the results. Even as George watched him, the gaunt and mangy hound commenced to display symptoms of uneasiness. He ran about in a staggering trot, snapping and staring blindly, and presently collapsing in a heap, he was seized with a spasmodic contraction of the muscles that ended in a death struggle.

"Poisoned!" As George gasped the terrible word, horrified at the death which had been planned for himself and his friend, he saw a strange figure in the doorway of the ranch house.

A man dressed in neatly pressed white garments was a unique figure in the jungle. Even Dr. Ribiera and George had been unable to keep themselves presentable.

As the stranger emerged from the shadow of the doorway, approaching George's hut with deliberate heavy steps, his features became recognizable.

It was Pedro Valdez!

George strode out to meet him with his fists clenched. Valdez whistled over his shoulder and Manoel appeared followed by Rosita. She was arrayed in unaccustomed finery, evidently in honor of the master's visit.

George faced the group with blazing eyes.

"You murderers!" he screamed. "You cowards! You assassins! You've poisoned Dr. Ribiera!"

"What's all this?" Pedro turned to his half brother with raised eyebrows and anger in his voice.

Manoel shrugged. "He's crazy. I don't know what he's talking about!"

Only Rosita shrank, cowering from Pedro's stare.

"Don't deny it," cried George. "The doctor is in the hut. Dead! He ate the food you sent him! I fed the scraps to a dog. Look!" He pointed an accusing finger at the hound that lay lifeless in the sun.

The politician glared at his brother.

"What kind of tricks have you been up to?" snarled Pedro. "It is unfortunate that the doctor should have perished—but I could overlook that. He was unimportant. But this man!" He flashed an evil smile in George's direction. "He has been reserved for a special punishment."

Valdez faced George with a triumphant sneer. "How do you like it here on my plantation, eh? So far it has been good, but wait. First you will be flogged. Then you will be worked like a slave and every week you will receive another flogging."

"And that is not all. Your dear friend Guy Dalby has gone to New York to tell the police you are here. You will be executed! Bound to a chair and tortured by electricity according to the law of your barbarous country. How do you like that?"

George was aghast at the plot devised by Guy Dalby and Pedro Valdez. His tormentor turned to Manoel and continued:

"But I told you that you could work this

fellow with the peons. I said you could even beat him—not too much—but I expressly forbade you to kill him. Who has tried to poison him?"

"I know nothing about it," said Mancel sullenly. "All I know is that I have made up my mind to have him flogged to-day."

"Flogged to-day? Why?"

"Strung up and flogged by the two strongest blacks on the place," declared Manoel. "Rosita swears that this wretched pasty-faced outcast tried to make love to her—would you believe it? The scoundrel had the audacity to try to take away my girl!"

Valdez looked at Rosita with a slow appreciative smile. "Did he succeed, my pretty one? Did he force you to give him a kiss?"

Rosita let her eyes droop shyly and then she flashed a look of anger at George. "Let me see him flogged," she begged.

At a whistle from Manoel two negroes had come running and George found himself in their grasp. Even before the wound had weakened him, George would have been helpless in the grip of these half-naked giants.

Pedro Valdez smiled sardonically as he drew near the girl and allowed her weight to rest on his shoulder. "You little devil! I'll wager it was you who tried to poison him." He spoke in caressing accents.

"No, no, no!" cried Rosita. "But I'd love to see him flogged. I would like to flog him with my own hands. Please!" she clasped her hands in supplication, "Let me hold the whip! —Just one lash!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK



THE LINE THAT LASTS

THEY talk of "lines" that maidens "pull"

With men, and hint of methods clever;
They speak of "bluff" and "talk" and "bull!"

There's just one line that lasts forever
And never fails. It's *always* had 'em

(The men) and hauled 'em on the shelf
Since Eve demurely lisped to Adam:

"Now tell me all about yourself!"

They talk so solemnly, the men,

Of woman's ruses sly and skillful;

They call her weak and vain—and then

They call her proud and strong and willful!

No wonder every flapper smiles

Who knows (as half the flappers do),

The simple phrase that so beguiles—

It's *"Now let's talk of you—just you!"*

Perhaps she's warm—perhaps she's cold—

Perhaps she's plain—perhaps she's pretty—

Perhaps she's shy—perhaps she's bold;

It doesn't matter, more's the pity!

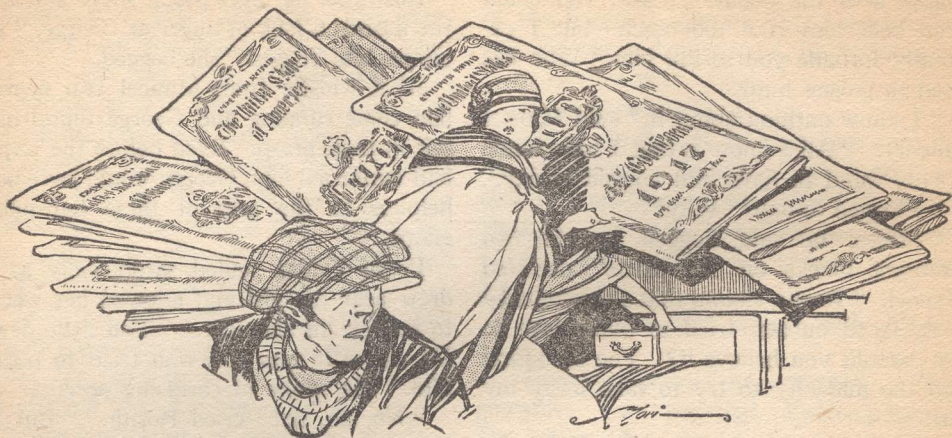
She doesn't need a childish pout—

A rippling laugh—a low sweet brow—

For when she says, *"Let's talk about*

Yourself!" he loves her, anyhow!

Helen Cowles LeCron.



Judgments

By NAN MOYNAHAN

A SHARP wind nagged at the lower city as Janet Murdock came out of the *Blade* building and made her way across City Hall Park. It was a blustery sort of gale, picking up stray bits of paper as it scampered along and lifting sudden eddies of dust into the eyes of the hurrying throngs. It sent the blood whipping through Janet's veins and the color flooding her cheeks. There was still time—they did not receive visitors at the Tombs until two o'clock—for a brisk walk, before keeping her appointment.

Appointment was hardly the name for it, she thought grimly. It seemed a thoroughly fruitless undertaking to her and she was annoyed with the whole affair. There had been no appointment made—Wade had seen to that—and she had no certainty that the warden would grant her an interview with Mme. Le Montague. She knew from long experience, the impatience of prison officials with anything that smacked of a sob story, especially with the trial so near at hand. But it had been Wade's idea—and with him, to think was to act.

No other city editor she'd ever known but would have had the whole thing ar-

ranged beforehand so that it would go off smoothly and the success of the venture be assured. Wade was not that kind. "No favors!" was his motto. "Let everybody work out his own salvation."

"Just go down to the visitors' house," he had ordered, "send in your card and ask to see Mme. Le Montague. Ever been inside of that visitors' house? Say, it's a scream. No privacy—no conference chambers for the favored ones to sit and discuss things on the Q. T. with their friends. No, siree! It's the essence of democracy—a sort of bedlam let loose. Get in and give us a picture of her in that atmosphere. She's a good looker, the police reporters tell me. Play that up. She's one of the slickest crooks in the world if she's pulled that job—fifty thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds—think of it? Let's hear your impressions—the general environment is what we want. She's in with all the riff-raff of the city. Tell us how she sizes up with Judy O'Grady. Ask her anything you like—what she thinks her chances for acquittal are? If she has any friends or relatives with her? Anything you like—but get the atmosphere!"

The walk in the bracing air had a soothing effect on Janet's temper and she felt her impatience subside and her interest quicken as she turned into Center Street and saw the gray granite walls of the Tombs just before her. A large crowd had gathered in the street and Janet soon discovered the cause of their interest. They were all intent on a gate in the prison wall marked Visitors' Entrance.

So she must stand with this seething mob until they saw fit to admit her? This would have pleased Wade—no chance here for any special consideration.

Janet glanced curiously over the crowd. People of all races and nationalities were jostling for positions of advantage. Here and there sad eyed Italian women lugging heavy infants in their arms, while others tugged at their voluminous skirts, waited stolidly. A slender little woman of the Orient clad in her native dress, stood apart, trying to appear unconscious. Undoubtedly, the innocent sufferer of some episode of the Tongs, was Janet's thought. Colored men and women; long-whiskered Jews; plain Americans of every caste and condition, crowded the narrow street.

A slim little Italian girl engaged Janet in conversation. Her sweetheart was in there. Yes, he had been in a stabbing affair. In halting English, interspersed with many pious ejaculations, she related the story, calling upon all the saints to witness his innocence. Did Janet think there was danger of his being convicted? Courts were so cruel!

Janet's attempt at reassurance was suddenly cut short. The gate was open. The line was moving.

She found herself inside the building in a long corridor, on one side of which, behind a rail and a wire caging, ranged a series of booths. These booths were already occupied by prisoners. The air was alive with wails and calls and conversation shouted in every tongue. Eager questions hurled across the space; halting answers from gray and hopeless lips. Sobs and giggles and angry epithets!

How useless! thought Janet. Was there any one there able to pick his answer from that bedlam of sound? Poor wretches!

What an interloper she felt in the face of all that misery. Her old irritation with Wade arose again and she was about to struggle toward the entrance when an attendant approached her. She told him that she had come to see Mme. Le Montague.

"I'll see if she'll come down. Chances are her counsel won't let her talk to any one."

Janet thanked him and waited. Her little Italian acquaintance had gained entrance and was standing near shouting to her sweetheart on the opposite side. Janet watched the dark, eager face with its swift change of expression, as a perfect torrent of emotion poured from her lips. The only word he uttered, but it came at regular intervals, was a repetition of "*Sì—sì—*" but his face glowed.

Janet smiled and moved nearer. She's brought him good news, poor soul! She'd speak to the girl later. Might be a story in it.

"Mme. Le Montague 'll see you, miss. She's over there!"

Janet turned and looked across. A tall, dark woman clad simply but perfectly in a black crêpe gown, the long lines accentuating her grace and slimness, looked questioningly across the gap. Her dark eyes set in a face of extreme pallor had an expression that Janet found it hard to fathom. They were not unfriendly—for when Janet bowed, her rouged lips parted in a smile.

She gestured deprecatingly at the motley throng as if apologizing for the poverty of her welcome; then in a low voice she said something in rapid French. Janet moved nearer. Above the din she heard her own voice frame the question:

"On the eve of your trial, Mme. Le Montague, the *Blade* would like to know upon what you base your hope of acquittal." How crass and bold it sounded. The words were scarcely out of her mouth before she wished that she could take them back.

At the mention of the *Blade*, Janet noticed an almost imperceptible straightening of the woman's figure—as if bracing herself for an attack; but the lips continued to smile as she pressed forward and in perfectly collected tones said:

"Upon ze evidence, of course, *mademoiselle*, a' bon droit—"

"Will you have friends with you, *madame*? Are your people in this country?" There was a full minute's hesitation, then Janet caught the answer.

"I am alone in zis coun-tree!" A weary little smile played about the corners of her mouth and Janet knew she was studying the effect of this answer upon her questioner. Then wearily: "It is imposseeble, *mademoiselle*—this mob"—indicating with a shrug of her expressive shoulders her feeling for her associates—"I weesh I might spik wiz you in private, but, no—it is not permit. Please excuse. I am sorry. *Merci!*"

Janet watched the trim figure move down the corridor. Once she turned and the small red lips parted in a smile. She certainly did not look the criminal. More, she had the air of a philosopher who awaits the opportune moment to confound her persecutors—her judges—the Wades of the world—as an afterthought.

"Well, at least I'll keep an open mind," decided Janet. "The French, when they do turn to crime, make unusually clever criminals. I'll go easy on the sympathy stuff—be careful about forming any snap judgments."

Janet's story made the last edition—just a report of the interview with a generous dash of atmosphere to cover the sparsity of real news, but Wade was pleased.

"Good stuff, Miss Murdock," he volunteered. "Glad you didn't lay on the mush. That woman's guilty. You go along with Briscom in the morning. He's doing the trial from the news end, but I'd like a feature story every day. Size her up in your own way and give the women of New York a chance to see what crimes one of their own sex is capable of. If you handle it as well as you did this one, we ought to put on twenty thousand in two weeks."

Janet's thoughts went back to that slender dark-eyed girl so palpably an alien to her hideous surroundings, and she was on the verge of telling Wade just what she thought of him and his cruel convictions. But a job was a job and she had plenty of use for hers, so all she said was:

"Well, we'll let the State try her first. Remember, she's innocent until they prove her guilty!"

"Well, it won't take 'em long to do that," he chuckled as he moved away.

II.

JANET was early in the court room the following morning and awaited with some interest the arrival of Mme. Le Montague. When she was brought in all eyes were at attention. She came swinging down the inclosure, her well-poised head, sleek and simply coiffed, turning neither to the right nor left. She seemed unconscious of her surroundings until she took her seat at her counsel's table; then she sent swift, darting glances about her. When her eyes chanced to rest upon Janet, her lips parted in a smile and she gave a quick nod of pleased recognition.

All stood for the entrance of the judge and the trial was under way. As the selection of the jury proceeded, Janet found herself as interested in the type of man selected as Mme. Le Montague herself appeared to be. The Frenchwoman held whispered conversation from time to time with her counsel and Janet noticed that it was after one of these that the prospective juror was usually challenged.

Apparently, she had much to say in the choice of her jury. It was an interesting pastime when one had nothing at stake and Janet fell to picking the men with whom she would care to trust her fate. Evidently her ideas did not always conform to the ideas of Mme. Le Montague, for on two occasions her attorney challenged the men on whom Janet had looked with favor.

"Wonder what she feared in them?" Janet mused. "They look like men with open minds."

Finally it was accomplished; the jury box was full. The district attorney opened for the people. Janet listened to the flow of oratory as he brought home his contentions to the jury. The State would prove, was his contention, that the defendant—pointing an accusing finger at the slender girl seated just ahead of Janet—this defendant had been an accessory to the theft

of fifty thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds, of the issues of 1917 and 1918. She had pledged these bonds at various times throughout the country and witnesses would prove that the woman who pledged these bonds and the defendant in this case, were one and the same. Her accomplice had already been tried and convicted, but with that exaggerated sense of gallantry peculiar to the French, refused to implicate the defendant in this case. It now remained for the jury when they had heard the facts, to find her equally guilty with the man.

Janet's story that day concerned itself with interesting bits of the trial and Mme. Le Montague's apparent reaction to all that went on about her. She gave a gossip analysis of the spectators, mentioning a few names of prominent people who, because of the nature of the crime, had been interested. Though the court room was scarcely half full, Janet had a column of good human interest stuff and again Wade was pleased.

As the trial moved on, Janet wondered at the courage of the defendant. Witness after witness testified as to the pledging of the bonds. The trial ran from New York through Cincinnati, Louisville, Kansas City, Tulsa, El Paso; and always the destroying fact came out, that a woman—a French woman—young and attractive—had appeared as one of the prime movers in the transaction.

"Is the woman in this court room?" thundered the district attorney.

"Yes, the defendant is the woman!"

Through it all she sat apparently unmoved. It was hard to connect her in any way with the figures of the underworld who came forward to give their testimony. Frequently a suggestion from her brought forth a cross-question that left the witness floundering for an answer—often totally discredited in the eyes of the jury.

After one such occasion as this, Janet resolved to express herself a little more frankly in the evening paper. The witnesses had lied and been shown to lie. She could see that even the jury was convinced of that.

Every day the court room was more crowded, until the day on which the State rested its case, there was scarcely standing room.

"All due to your stuff," laughed Briscum. "Pretty soft for you sob sisters. We do the deadly work of the trial and you get all the attention for a little personal opinion. It's getting the public, though. The paper's selling like hot cakes. Old Wade's tickled to death."

"I think most of his pleasure is due to the fact that he thinks I'm against Mme. Le Montague. Keeps warning me not to forget that a Liberty Bond has a symbolic interest as well as a negotiable value."

"Well, I think it pays to handle him a bit carefully. He doesn't have any qualms about cutting the pay roll, you know."

Janet gave this last speech considerable thought during the next few days. Her articles were interesting the public and hordes of letters were coming in. The court attendants were beginning to have trouble handling the crowds; and on one or two occasions lately she had surprised an expression of interest on the face of Mme. Le Montague's attorney when he looked in her direction. And as yet she had hardly given voice to her convictions. Would she dare? If she were on the jury how would she vote?

If it were any other city editor but Wade. To-morrow she'd say what she thought. But to-morrow something urged her to be cautious. Better hold off until something happened that left no question of doubt in her mind. After all, what did it matter if she didn't make the most of her opportunity? It would soon be forgotten. Newspaper work was like that. You might pull the biggest scoop of the year on Friday. Monday, if you fell down on an assignment, all your Friday value was forgotten. "Every day is a fresh beginning; every morn is a world made new," must have been inspired by the life of a reporter. Strange world.

Not until the State had rested and the defense had opened its case had she a chance to express the thoughts seething within her. Rackham, Mme. Le Montague's attorney, a dapper gentleman of the old school, had many new and surprising bits of evidence up his sleeve. These he proceeded to exhibit before the bulging eyes of the spectators as a conjurer produces

his rabbit. He did not dwell upon the helplessness of the defendant, rather he told of her surprise that a mistaken identity could so artfully conceal the truth of a situation.

He had witnesses to prove that at the times stated, Mme. Le Montague could not possibly have been in the places mentioned; for at those times she was at her home in Paris or right here in New York. Tulsa? Kansas City? Places she had never heard of—though he begged the pardon of those communities for her indifference to their existence. Witness after witness came forward to substantiate his claims. Most of them stood up well under the fire of cross-examination. Occasionally, one would flounder helplessly and Janet found herself breathlessly studying the faces of the jury to see the devastating effects of the breakdown.

Then the defense played its trump card. Rackham put his client on the stand and led her through the various incidents of her life, touching on Paris, Bordeaux, London, and lastly, New York. She had a surprising memory and was nonplused that any one should think for a minute that she was involved in the crime that the State had accused her of. Then Rackham turned her over to the district attorney. She was charmingly gracious, never for a moment losing her fine poise, even when his attacks on the adventuress type of French woman became exceptionally pointed. After repeated attempts to break down her story, during which he became noticeably irritable, he finally gave up and dismissed her.

"Will you kindly stay in the witness chair for a moment, Mme. Le Montague?" Rackham was suave and smiling. Then to the attendant: "Please call Miss Felice Monteux."

There was an expectant hush as Miss Monteux came swinging down the aisle and stepped up beside Mme. Le Montague. Her surprising resemblance sent a thrill through the spectators. People nudged each other, commenting upon the unusual likeness. After the first gasp of surprise had subsided and the witness had been duly sworn, Rackham asked:

"Mme. Le Montague, have you ever seen

this woman before?" indicating Miss Monteux.

"No."

Rackham turned slowly toward the jury. For a full minute his glance rested on the twelve men in the box. Then very deliberately he turned and addressed Miss Monteux.

"Miss Monteux, have you ever seen this woman before?" pointing a long index finger at the defendant.

"No," came the tremulous answer.

Again he waited, and the significance of the pause was not lost upon the court room. He wanted the almost unbelievable resemblance of the two women to fix itself indelibly upon the court and jury. Then: "That is all, Mme. Le Montague!"

"Miss Monteux," he continued, "is, of course, innocent of any connection with the crime." He explained that he was merely using her to prove how close a resemblance might exist between two people entirely unrelated and entirely unknown to each other. This had happened to Mme. Le Montague—might happen to any innocent person. Unfortunately she was the victim of just such a circumstance.

Questioned by the State's attorney, Miss Monteux repeated over and over the same answers. She lived with her widowed mother in an apartment in the West Seventies. Was employed in a down town shop, where all the girls were highly interested in the outcome of this particular case. They all read a certain paper each night and discussed the situation as it was presented by a woman writer on that paper.

Janet flushed as she heard her name heralded through the silent court room. Miss Monteux's likeness to the pictures of Mme. Le Montague had often been spoken of by the girls in the shop, and in some unaccountable way, this fact had reached Rackham's office. One of his assistants had appeared at her place of business and asked her to appear in court. At first she had demurred, fearing that they might in some way connect her with the crime, but on his assurance that nothing unpleasant would come of it; and urged on by the other girls, who felt that it was in the cause of justice, she had come.

That afternoon Janet let herself go. She wrote her whole soul into her story. Laid particular stress on the web that could wind itself about one once they were within the toils of the law; drew a picture of the frail defendant; her helplessness in a foreign country; her appealing wistfulness on the stand; the courage of the other girl who had braved publicity that justice might be served; closing with a denunciation of certain witnesses for the State who had proved themselves perjurers. This done, she put on her hat and coat and walked stormily out of the office. Job or no job, she'd done what she thought was right.

Wade was waiting for her when she arrived the next morning. "I see you've tried the case and returned a verdict," he said scathingly. "I've opened more'n a hundred letters already from sentimental fools, all raving over the injustice of our courts. Want the *Blade* to start a crusade to end the persecution of innocent women. Innocent, bah! I told you to go easy on that sympathy stuff. Your first articles were fine, but this last is maudlin. We'll be the laughing stock of the town, once the jury returns its verdict!"

"Mr. Wade"—Janet's eyes were blazing—"you sent me to this trial instructed to write it from a woman's standpoint. I listened carefully to the evidence, and only because I used the greatest restraint was I able to write those first stories. Yesterday I wrote what I thought and felt, regardless of the job. I may be wrong, but I intend to be sincere. If you want me to quit, all right, but I'm going to say what I think is right if I continue."

"Well, to-day's the last day. Finish it out. I suppose a lot of sentimental women are waiting for you to tell them how to think, so get busy. But, remember, there's a jury on the job and it's their privilege to bring in a verdict to-day, please God!" He went back to the desk, and Janet thoroughly disgruntled, stuffed a few sheets of copy paper into her bag and started for the courthouse. Just wait until Mme. Le Montague is acquitted—I'll walk up and tell him to take the old job. If he hasn't any more confidence in my judgment than that, I don't want to work for him."

Mme. Le Montague smiled brightly and waved a small white hand in her direction as she sat down beside her attorney, and once Rackham turned and bowed graciously to her.

The entire morning was spent by Rackham in a résumé of his client's case; and the State's attorney consumed the afternoon with his side of the story. Finally after a day in which she found it increasingly difficult to keep her mind on the matter in hand, as hour succeeded hour, the case was turned over to the jury. Janet decided to wait in the court room until the verdict was returned. She could not face Wade again and dared not write her story until she knew what the answer was to be.

Mme. Le Montague left the room, but before she went she leaned over and thanked Miss Murdock for the interest she was taking in her case.

"It has been such a comfort," she said in her halting English, "to feel that some women understand the position I am in. Your articles have been very won-dair-ful!" And Rackham had added to this: "Yes, Miss Murdock, you seem to have sized the situation up exactly. I have been very much interested in your daily story."

How Janet wished that Wade might have heard this. Rackham's opinion was not to be taken lightly, whatever he might think of Mme. Le Montague's.

Janet read the evening papers and waited. Briscom went out and bought them sandwiches and coffee and still they waited. All sorts of wagers were being laid by the reporters and the attendants as to the outcome of the trial, and Janet listened and laughed indulgently at the banter of the crowd. Once Briscom asked her how she was getting along with Wade.

"Oh, we had a real run-in this morning. I've thought pretty seriously of resigning once the trial is over."

"Don't you do it. Don't let him scare you out. A fellow who worked with him out in St. Louis tells me that he's got a bug on convicting women. He got up against some kind of a feminine panhandler out there, nine or ten years ago and she got a cool thousand away from him. He never made much of a holler. Didn't want

it known what an easy mark he was; but since then he's down on the slick woman crook. He contends that a murderer isn't in it with these thieving scoundrels."

So that was it? Janet was glad for some explanation of his vindictiveness.

Finally when everybody was fearful that it was to be an all night affair, the judge was summoned from his chambers, the jury appeared and the defendant was brought in. She was pale, "but," thought Janet, "no paler than I!"

"Gentlemen of the jury, have you reached a verdict?" came the singsong of the clerk.

"We have; we find the defendant"—Janet strained forward—"not guilty!"

In a moment bedlam was let loose. The court rapped for order, thanked the jury for their services and dismissed them. Mme. Le Montague was everywhere. Shaking the hands of the jurymen; kissing Rackham on both cheeks; then, making a lunge for Janet, she embraced her warmly.

"You splendid girl, you have done so much to help me! I must see you and have a talk wiz you. I sail on Saturday. Can I not see you to-morrow, for just a leetle while—to show you that I do thank you? It has all been very won-dair-ful! At my hotel, then, to-morrow for ze luncheon. Tell me that you will come."

Janet thanked her. "I'm sure I'll be delighted to come!"

"Oh, sank you, *bon ami, au plaisir de vous revoir*," and she was borne smilingly away on the arm of her attorney.

Janet hurried to the office to write her story. It would make the first edition in the morning. As she sat down to the typewriter she looked hastily around for Wade. He was not there. Too bad! She would have reveled in a bit of gloating to-night. If he were at all caustic she could resign.

III.

MME. LE MONTAGUE proved a charming hostess. Where she had been so subdued and reserved during the trial, she was all smiles and life this morning. She was interested in Janet's work and asked innumerable questions about every phase of it.

Did she work with men? How were they as business associates?

Janet, laughingly, confided that with the exception of one, they were all splendid good friends and fellow workers. Wade, the city editor, was hard to get along with. Too bad, too, because, of course, he had a lot of power. Then as briefly as possible she told of the trouble he had made for her each day her trial stories had appeared. "But, it's all in a lifetime. I suppose it could be a whole lot worse."

Mme. Le Montague looked steadily at her, then with little clucks of dismay expressed her sympathy for one forced to work with a person of such intolerant views.

"I have always found, Miss Murdock, ze men have ze best of it. We poor women must suffair, is it not so? But you in your profession have ze pow-air to help so many unfortunate women. In my countree, the pen is very pow-air-ful. Here it is the same, is it not, *mademoiselle*? And, you, *ma chérie*, must always be true to your sex—don't let ze men get ze best of it? But, why do you stay on zis pa-pair, wiz ze so cruel man?"

"Well," laughed Janet, "I can't very well afford to give it up, though I've thought it might be the best thing to do. I've grown sort of attached to the *Blade*. Don't know that you would understand it, but when you're doing this kind of work you develop a sort of loyalty to the sheet you work on which makes it hard to break away. Then, too, it might take me several weeks to land something else, and I'm in no position to be out of work that long. You see, I'm not a saving damsel!"

"But you would like to, what you say—queet—if he does not pair-mit you to express yourself independently?"

"That's just it," and Janet laughed at the French woman's understanding.

She enjoyed the hour they were together immensely and bade her good-by with a real regret. She was pleased when Mme. Le Montague insisted that she would remember her always. "Some day I will show you that I appreciate ze rare judgment that you have shown," had been her parting, and Janet went back to the office with a light heart.

A society assignment occupied her that afternoon and a meeting of the State Federation took her out of the city for two weeks. When she returned, Wade strolled over to her desk. She had not seen him since the trial.

"Well, I see you got your wish," he began. "Your story aroused all the sentimental senses of justice in the city, I hear, and sent all the duplicate editions of the Montague woman flocking to the court to prove that she couldn't possibly be herself. Good work, but in a poor cause. Now here's the case of a woman who ought to be acquitted. Plenty of chance to drench yourself and public in tears. She only murdered a beast of a husband after he had tried to brain her. Her trial opens this morning. Go down and see what you get out of it. Of course she won't be good looking and you'll not be impressed by her clothes, but, remember, listen occasionally to the testimony," and he was gone.

Gone before Janet had a chance to rise and tell him how little his judgment amounted to. He need not try to insult her. She'd been right all the time. Twelve men had borne her out in that.

Well, she'd hurl the job in his face, anyway. The job—that was the worst of it. Still she must quit. She had been right. Wade was wrong.

She glanced through the drawers of her desk, making a neat little pile of her personal belongings.

Idly she reached for the mail that the boy had just placed for her. One letter attracted her attention. It was addressed in a vivid, fashionable script and bore the postmark "Paris."

Janet tore it open. It was from Mme. Le Montague.

Paris almost immediately, *ma chérie*, but please think of me always as

Your sincere friend,

JACQUELINE LE MONTAGUE.

Janet unfolded the inclosure and studied it for a moment. It was a Liberty Bond of the issue of 1917. For a moment—a long moment—she stared at it. Then a wave of anger and chagrin taking possession of her she looked quickly at the letter again. There was no address given. She sat staring at the thing, while around her came tumbling the house of pride and self-confidence and assurance that she had built for herself so happily at the close of the trial.

Taking a plain white envelope from her desk she slipped the bond within and sealed it carefully. This done, she glanced toward the desk. Wade was scanning some copy before him. His shade was low over his eyes. She wondered what he would have given that moment for a sight of that bond. She put on her coat and hat—started for the door, returned, and went up to Wade.

"I'll take that assignment, Mr. Wade. What court did you say it was in?"

"Oh, yes, let me see. It's in General Sessions, Part 3," referring to a memorandum on his desk. "Give us some good stuff, but be careful in your judgments!"

"Judgments," mused Janet to herself. "Strange things—judgments."

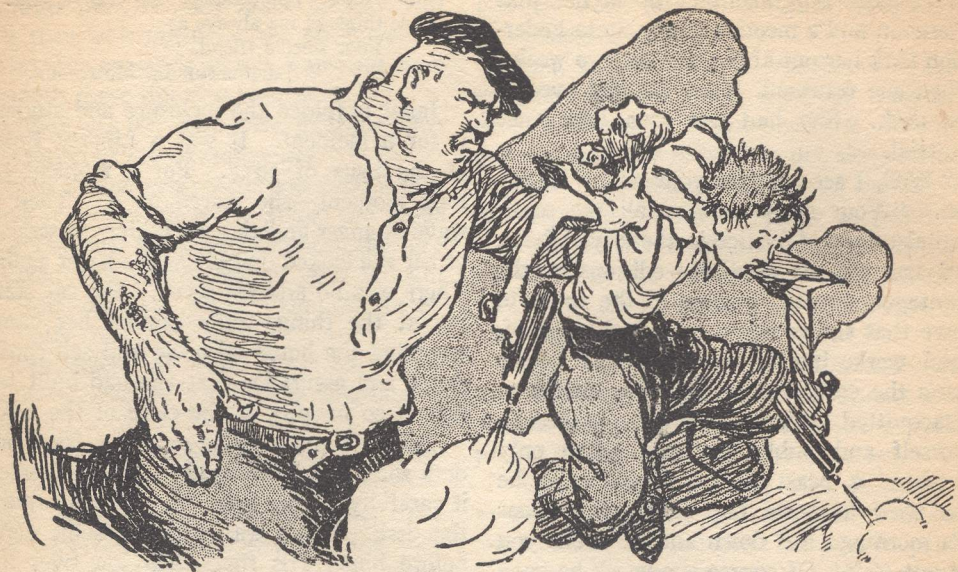
She glanced at her watch. Fifteen minutes to get to court. Five of these would do—the other ten could be spent to a better purpose.

As she left the building Janet veered off toward the Bowery. She walked rapidly until she came within sight of a dilapidated brown stone front, the only remaining reminder of a past grandeur in the squalid neighborhood. A sign on the stoop announced that in this house daily, dinners were served to New York's homeless poor. A large red box marked "Contributions to the Fund for the Maintenance of this Worthy Charity" hung from the railing. Janet glanced hurriedly about. No one was in sight. It was still too early for the line of "down and outers" to be forming. As she passed the box a plain white envelope slipped from her fingers into it.

MY DEAR Mlle. MURDOCK:

I have only just arrived home, but you are in my thoughts so much. Now that I am free, I do wish so much to give freedom to other girls who are forced to live or work where they are unhappy. Please accept the inclosed from me. It will help you until you are able to find another position far from the Wade who makes you so unhappy. In your work you will know of ways to dispose of it. I shall never see you again, for I leave

THE END



Buccaneer Blood

By **KENNETH PERKINS**

Author of "Queen of the Night," "Sundown Café," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

ENTER THE AVENGER!

TIM HOLLOWAY'S consternation, like the mental states of most boys of his age, was only momentary. He picked up two guns from the floor.

His master was lying on the staircase landing with the bulky hunched form of McCorkle on his chest. Wing and Parson were disarmed. The negro Quintilian had crouched behind that tower of spiritual strength, his mistress. The latter had turned toward the stairs, but checked herself, with a realization—probably inborn—that she was stepping into the path of bullets. She remained, still the dominant figure, whose grim face had not so much as blanched at the smell of gunpowder.

What stage could have been more per-

fectly set than this—to kindle the heart of a boy! Tim Holloway with a gun in each hand stepped into as great a climax of drama as his imagination had ever evoked. The power to solve everything was in his two wiry little hands. For the first time in his life he was in a position to engage in a glorious and righteous combat—to shoot to kill! And what was more heroic, more enthralling than this? He found himself transformed suddenly into a two-gun man—that most dreadful of fiction characters, which had been the idol of his dreams!

It must be noted—that except in his dreams—this was the first time Tim Holloway had ever fired a revolver at a man. It had always seemed a very simple matter. But he was greatly disillusioned. And as for firing two guns—that took a miracle of co-ordination which most fighters—includ-

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ing Tim Holloway—did not possess. Tim had never known that it is the hardest trick in the world to hit a man with a six-gun, and if you fire two guns at once, it is well nigh impossible.

Tim banged away, each shot kicking back at him with such energy that he thought both of his wrists were broken. McCorkle, having disarmed Cameron, stood up and looked at this little mouse-eyed tousle-headed figure hurling his shots in every corner of the room. The big man burst into a roar that cut in sharply with the hoarse barking of the guns. He had often boasted that he would let any two-gun man stand up and pot away at him—provided, of course, that he used both guns. And here was this little urchin, backing away with each kick of the guns, making an heroic attempt to kill four men—succeeding only in breaking a large amount of valuable glass and antiques.

He kept pulling the triggers. A crockery vase smashed to bits; a leaded pane in the stained glass window burst into a thousand cracks like a spider's web; a Peruvian jug split in half with a shower of red wine. Then abruptly, Tim Holloway's two guns snicked on empty shells. His heroic rôle was over. There was a sudden silence, an exhilarating smell of powder and spilled wine in everyone's nostrils; a tangle of smoke lifting upward over the candles which, flickering in the series of percussions, again resumed their pallid vertical flames.

Again McCorkle's roar burst into the silence. He bellowed in his laughter like an ox.

"Here you, Parson!" he cried, pointing to Cameron, "take this swob's iron and keep him covered!"

Parson obeyed, going up to the landing, and standing guard over the disarmed and helpless Cameron.

"No, don't kill him," McCorkle advised. "No killin' unless expressly called for. We'll save him. He might know where some treasure's hid. We can break his legs—sure! But no wanton killin' as the sayin' goes."

McCorkle thumped down the stairs, and, with tremendous shoulders and mountain-

ous belly still rolling in chuckles, he crossed the room toward Tim Holloway.

Tim stood very much disillusioned with his rôle of two-gun man. He sniffed in anger and embarrassment, wiping his nose with his sleeve. He crouched as the giant McCorkle approached him, as if threatening to spring at the man's throat.

"You lay a hand on me, you pot-bellied lubber, and I'll tear your liver out with me bare hands!" Tim's hair gave the definite effect of bristling.

"Zowie! but he's got a bit of spirit—this little wharf rat!" McCorkle roared with delight. "Now then, my little cocky, let me have them irons!"

"Avast there, or I'll let you have 'em athwart yer chin!"

McCorkle reached for the boy, gathered a fistful of his costume and tossed him into the air. Catching him again by one leg he held him upside down, giving him a good shaking. He not only shook out the two guns from his grasp, but likewise an astonishing shower of cartridges that had been stowed away in every part of his costume.

"So help me God, you'll pay dearly for this!" Tim cried when he was again set upon his feet. "Tim Holloway never forgets!"

He yanked viciously at his shirt which had worked up in a tangle about his armpits. "Whoever ye are, ye'll never smell grass again—not if I know it! Ye can lay to that!" He pulled down his sleeves, and took another hitch in his belt. "I'll never forget—not till me dyin' day, so help me!"

In between his incontinent guffaws, the ponderous McCorkle managed to say: "Damned if he ain't built after me own heart! Just the sort I've always wanted for to pipe me up in the mornin'—for to whistle for a breeze when the weather ain't makin'. He'd be a mascot to bring good luck to any ship, b'God! Come on, Puss-in-boots, I'm goin' to sign ye up. Thought I'd have to bump you off into hell—where that scruffer up there's goin'—" he pointed a turtle-shelled thumb towards Cameron—"but I'm goin' to save ye. Ye're too good to bump off. Ye're a little treasure—that's what! And I'm goin' to

save you—" he burst out again in an uproarious jeer—"and make a two-gun man out'n ye!"

McCorkle looked around the room—again the undisputed master of the scene. The interlude had slightly delayed him in his work of burglarizing the old château—but what of that? Until now the game had been utterly lacking in adventure and excitement, except, it might be added, for those brain-heating swigs of the chatelaine's liquor. Now excitement had come in earnest. Contrary to his first intent, McCorkle concluded that he would have to do some killing; and the thought, together with the intoxication of the wine, gladdened him.

They all waited in an expectant and ominous silence for his command. He looked about at the attentive anxious faces. Dorset had made bold to come from out the protection of that arras. He stood with feverish and frightened eyes—his mouth pursed in the pride of his recent felicitous stroke: that shot of his had solved all of his master's problems.

"A good trick, Dorset!" the chief commented—as his eye fell upon the ragged figure and the ghastly grinning face. "But if you hadn't been so crazy scairt from the first, you wouldn't have missed your man. Come here. Let's see your hand."

Hesitant and shy, the cockney engineer presented himself before his skipper, "Hold out your hand." Dorset held it out as if expecting the extraordinary honor of shaking with the great McCorkle. "Just as I thought!" McCorkle sneered. "Shakin' like a flyin' jib! Faugh! All right. You watch the women and children. That's all *you're* good for when you ain't stowed away in the lugger, greasin' up the mule."

He pointed over his shoulder at the chatelaine. "Git that old flat-footed dame there to set down. She's makin' me crazy. And lock the ole black up in that thar closet. He can't do no harm, but the room's gettin' hot. If he stays on deck any more we'll all dither off in a faint for want of air!"

Dorset obeyed, herding the negro into the china closet. The door was slammed upon him. The old chatelaine sat down, and Dorset took his position as their guard.

"Now then!" McCorkle turned his attention to the most important matter at hand—to the only source of actual physical danger—that man who had attempted the humanly impossible feat of holding up an armed gang.

Cameron sat on the stair landing with a slight stream of red clotting his forehead. Pale, and yet fully possessed of his strength and senses, he presented a defiant and savage picture. Parson, the octoroon, stood, crouching anxiously over him with a gun muzzle not two feet away from his chest.

"Leave me put this lubber out of the way, Chief," Parson counseled. "He ain't a pleasant lookin' customer. First thing you know we'll have another fight on our hands—which we ain't got time!"

"Do 'em all in—that's my advice!" little Dorset cried. "Here yer've got me wiv three of these balmies on me hands. Cos why? Blame me if I know. Shoot 'em orl dahn—every one. No, I ain't afraid of this ole gel here—nor of the black, nor of the little codger. But any one of 'em will pop the daisy on us if we let 'em live. Kill 'em all. Dead men tell no tyles!"

McCorkle, already in his cups, settled back in the cathedral chair while his three ministers of state discussed this matter. According to his inveterate custom he held his peace whenever there was any discussion. Whenever his men proposed, he would dispose.

He looked to the ancient and the worldly-wise seaman, Wing, who as yet had offered no advice.

Inasmuch as Wing's main concern was the immediate acquisition of treasure, he was not so much obsessed with the fear of State's prison. If they massacred every one in the house, there was the possibility that no one would ever know where the bulk of the Lafitte and Raiglon treasure was hidden.

"Keep 'em alive," he said curtly. "Torture 'em till they tell us where every copper's hid. Give me my share and I'm through!"

"Through is it—wiv his bloody 'ands washed! Yuss! Just as I thought!" Dorset cried. "I stays here tied to the apron

strings of this old baggage—and wiv a little snipe a-kickin' of me shins. And that rotten old negro besides. Yuss. A jolly evenin' for me—ain't it. While old Wing—blitherin' softy that he is—ransacks the 'ouse and makes orf with any swag he finds! Kill 'em—I tell yer! Shoot 'em dahn—all three of 'em—as well as that codger up there!"

"Dorset's right, captain!" the octoroon counseled. "Here's this house full of treasure waitin' to snatch, and we've spent the night palaverin'. Leave me blow this man's brains out—here and now."

"Dorset ain't right. He's scairt to death—and wants to murder every one in sight!" Wing said. "And the same for you, Parson—bein' you've got enough negro blood in yer to make yer yellow. Ain't nothin' to be scairt of. Git the swag now—and in a hurry—that's my advice, captain."

Captain McCorkle took a swig and belched—unmistakable signals to the men to hold their peace, and listen to his *pronunciamento*.

"Dorset and Parson is both right."

This had its effect—it was a grim sentence. Cameron heard the softly uttered words from the height of the stair-landing. He made a gesture—stopped by the steel muzzle now poked against his nude chest. The chatelaine's face showed a dreadful—an implacable pallor.

"But while we go through the house, Dorset stays guard," McCorkle continued. "Wing ain't a fool. We can't go aboard of 'em all at once. It's the last of the Raiglons race—and there may be secrets. Wing is right."

Wing stood, his white but sea-stained head nodding in the full halo of the candlelabrum.

"Now that gentleman up thar—" McCorkle said pointing his thumb at Cameron. "Yes, yes! H'm! We can't keep our cake—and eat it—can we now? He goes. But first a few questions of a personal nature is to be axed and answered. Then the hyacinths will take care of his carcass."

The chatelaine, still remaining calm before the insolent and hideous little Dorset who stood guard at her elbow, cast an exploring glance upward, as if to plead not

before God, but before the six Raiglons up there in the gloom of the walls.

"Then there's one thing else," McCorkle added. "As we was sayin' there's a little gal driftin' around somewheres. We must get her in tow. Otherwise we run afoul of her in the dark. No tellin' what a Raiglons gal will do."

"Then for the loot—ay, captain?" Wing prompted excitedly.

McCorkle took another swig, and looked up—following the gaze of the old chatelaine. His brow furrowed. Then, as if musing to himself, he concluded his judgment.

"As for this here house—there ain't no man who'll swear by his soul that this house is standin'. If it warden't standin' to-morrow who is there to ax questions? Nobody. Good! To-night when the loot's out—when these here prisoners is stowed away in some glory-hole below—" McCorkle paused before finishing his sentence. He wanted to make sure that every one in the room heard. There was no doubt about the tensivity with which they listened to each word. Even the chatelaine's eyes dropped—and met his.

"I said to-night," he concluded, "the house burns."

The old chatelaine of the Raiglons house looked up again to her gods. "Witness this tragedy!" she might have prayed to them. "You wielded your power against mightier and nobler enemies. Do you look down upon this waterfront scum besmirching the remnants of your house? Is your glorious power vanished forever? Are you mere shadows? Will you frown, will you grin, will you forever threaten to lift your swords and do nothing? Come down to us, fighters, seamen, Raiglons!"

These were the unuttered thoughts of the ancient lady. The actual, spoken words were coming from McCorkle—a smooth soft sentence, slightly slurred by drink.

"Come below, skipper, and stand by. We'll attend to you first."

In response to this command, Cameron got to his feet. He was about to start down the stairs, when he saw a very peculiar change come over McCorkle's face. The

bushy black brows lifted, the red-veined eyes bulged, the pudgy lips opened.

Cameron looked around at the faces of the others: Dorset had craned his long neck, showing a gulping Adam's apple. His cavernous, narrow-set eyes lit with a peculiar fire.

Wing's white head stopped nodding—a very intense gesture. The octoroon who was at Cameron's side turned about and looked over his shoulder towards the dim shadows above.

The chatelaine, seated until now in a Buddhistic contemplation of her gods, gave evidence for the first time that evening, of an appalling fright.

It was clear enough—this change of look and attitude of every one in the room. Jacqueline was coming down the stairs!

She was coming—totally unschooled in villainy—to cast her power, whatever it was, in the balance of that night's combat. She had a power that, wielded by many women in the past, had won battles. She had the blood of great fighters coursing in her veins. She had a beauty compounded not only of the enchantment of girlhood—but of a long race of Circes.

Cameron turned around, impulsively intent upon warning her to flee. But it was too late. She came.

McCorkle saw the slender fragile hand lifting the edge of her robe—she had thrown some sort of embroidered garment about her—a dazzling flame of color. Dorset's long jaw dropped as the gold slipper flashed in a ray of light, with a gleam of a high and delicate instep and the pale skin of an ankle. Parson's muddy eyes widened as he saw the wax-like shoulder emerging from the dark, as if floating from fathomless depths of black water into the soft green sunlight just below the surface. Thus were the paintings of the Raiglons eternally emerging from their shadows.

She descended to the landing where Cameron was waiting, and there she stood, beautiful, flaming with a coquettish scorn.

Her ancient grandam saw her, and she stood up, clasping gnarled and mummified hands. She had prayed to her gods—those six presences—to save the remnants of their earthly kingdom.

And from the darkness above—which they inhabited—they sent down this avenger!

CHAPTER XXII.

JACQUELINE'S WILES.

AS she stood on that stair landing, Jacqueline was on a level with the portraits of her ancestors. This was perhaps the reason why McCorkle noticed the similarity between her features and the features of her ancestors. The faces of those portraits, grim and menacing, had imprinted themselves deeply upon McCorkle's mind. They haunted him. Although he did not look at them now—such was the intentness with which he stared at the girl—he saw those lineaments dimly reflected in this one living and lovely face. All the grimness and cruelty of those visages had been rendered down into a composite of rare beauty.

Before any one spoke, a thought passed through McCorkle's mind. It was a thought which seemed to tickle his risibilities. His swollen paunch, sagging over the tightly drawn belt, began to ripple, sending a succession of chuckles into his throat. Till now he had been actually afraid of the third occupant of the Raiglon mansion—the girl. This was the dreadful unknown quantity, whom he had pictured hiding in one of those dark rooms, ready to kill whoever came too near her! He had expected to see another woman built on the heroic lines of Madame Raiglon and with the added danger of youth! Here instead he saw this little shadow of a being—this spirit. His guffaws rolled out. The very gusts of his breath might have been enough to blow her away—so McCorkle felt—as you blow out a candle flame.

"So this is the jane I thought was goin' to stick a knife athwart our backs—ay mates?" he laughed. "A jane? No that ain't quite the word. A queen's more like it!"

"A Lulu, says I!" the undersized Dorset piped up gleefully.

"Shut up, you little skunk!" McCorkle growled. "When it comes to women there's only one thing to say to such as you—and

that's 'Belay!' And you, too, Wing, you'll break your neck starin' thataway. Avast there, Parson! Stand off! This here's a state occasion."

McCorkle lumbered up to his feet. "Now, then, lady, I'm greetin' yer. Here's lookin' at yer! Come down to me, and ole McCorkle will show 'em how a lady had orter be treated! No! Belay! What the hell are *you* doin', Parson!"

For some reason or other the sight of Parson standing up there on one side of the girl, and about to offer her his arm, incited McCorkle to a fit of white-hot rage. Parson was an octoroon. Parson was an escaped criminal. He was the offspring of the tidewater scum of Baton Rouge! And here finding himself on a grand staircase with a beautiful woman, he proposed to blossom out as a gentleman! McCorkle never realized the boundlessness of his hate for this man Parson. "You damned, kinky-headed swine! You lousy half-breed! You sweatin', yellow-blooded African! So *you* think you can give your arm to a lady comin' down the stairs—is it!" McCorkle roared. He had an honest opinion that the very touch of Parson's hand would be an insult to the girl.

McCorkle indeed felt the necessity of etiquette, of a finely conducted ceremony. The ancient house had its effect upon him. He was not in a barroom. He was in the presence of the élite. Those superbly arrogant ancestors were watching him. If he had not been drunk he would have had the disagreeable feeling that he was an unwashed hog let loose in a splendid banquet hall. Being drunk, he felt adequately equipped to meet the situation. Parson was an eighth black, and hence belonged to the same caste as the negro butler. Dorset was so covered with the grease of his mule engine that he besmirched any thing he touched. Wing was a palsied inebriate. There was only one gentleman of that quartette—and that was McCorkle himself.

Jacqueline was frightened at what she saw. The four together—and so close to her—were far more terrifying than the distant view she had had from over the balustrade upstairs. She put out her hands impulsively and clung to Cameron's arm.

That was the picture: the octoroon whipped into his place, slinking to the back-ground, a gun still in his hand, bearing upon the back of Cameron. Then, out in the light, was the full length figure of Cameron, his wet pirate garb clinging to his superb and supple body, his head lowered like a beast driven to bay and threatening a last stand with its mate. By her momentary qualm the girl had melted into the picture of which Cameron was the dominant figure.

"So ho!" McCorkle cried, surprised enough, but not baffled. "He's good enough to take yer arm—ain't he now! Whoever he is with them rags on, I don't know. Can't guess. But he's fit to be your partner—ain't he? Even though he's a prisoner! He won't be fit ten minutes from now to be the partner of nobody! Lay to that, my pretty!"

The incongruity of the situation appealed to McCorkle. It was dramatic; it was grim. Here was a beautiful lady on the arm of a condemned man. Her partner's life—so McCorkle said to himself—would not last as long as a single one of the candles in that candelabrum at the opposite end of the table. Cameron, being condemned to die, had assumed a certain fascination. McCorkle was delighted with the sight of both—the beautiful girl, and the man whom he was about to torture and kill. He took a swig, gulping, holding his glass as if to drink their health. He could not help but thrill at the splendid picture.

"Two Creoles, b'God! Both of 'em!" he cried. "Come on down—escort her to the table, skipper. That's the way! You're a Creole born—whatever y'are—or whatever them rags is supposed to mean. Parson—you half-breed skunk—stand by! Not too close to 'em. Don't let her get a whiff of ye! Dorset, belay grinnin' or I'll knock out yer teeth! Off with yer cap thar Wing and stand by!"

They came down. With her hand upon that knotted arm, the girl felt a new power within her—a reassurance. She had already tasted of the strength of that arm. Physically, spiritually, they must be stronger than these fulsome beasts. Physically because of Cameron; spiritually be-

cause of the six gods looking down upon them. As she stepped down those stairs, she looked at McCorkle with scathing contempt. She was flushed, hot with pride and anger. She spoke to Cameron in a trembling whisper.

"They shall not harm you!"

"They shall not harm you!" he repeated. "Be brave. I can fight!"

"You are stronger than they—than any man. They can not stand up against you."

"No! Have courage. Once I can lay my hand upon a weapon—"

"There shall be time. I myself can see to that. There shall be time—and to spare."

"Or if—" he went on dropping to a scarcely audible whisper and without turning to her—"if they themselves were without arms—"

"Yes, then you could prevail with ease—"

He was whispering just as he led her to the floor: "For your sake—"

They stood before McCorkle.

With the vivid illusion that he was a courtier enacting a splendid and graceful ceremony, the hulking and steaming McCorkle bowed. Retaining this position—a difficult one because of his mountainous belly, he thrust out his hand with a gesture that was not without a certain reptilian grace. Fat men, it is generally admitted, perform with a brevity of movement, of exertion. McCorkle was static, but when he moved a limb—one was reminded of an elephant's trunk. He had reached out to take the girl's hand.

The old chatelaine saw this. She had arisen from her chair and stood grasping it—now finding herself tossed about in a hurricane of fears and emotions. How simple it had been to keep her equanimity when she faced her enemies alone! How different it was now that she was a spectator and her daughter was facing the same pack of beasts!

Jacqueline was facing a different sort of crisis. Would she meet it—the chatelaine asked herself—as became her blood? Had those Raiglons of old passed down their heritage from one generation to the other in vain? Was there yet a strain of that im-

maculate courage in the blood of a Raiglons woman? Just how much of the wiles, the cunning, the wisdom of those old pirate brides had been bequeathed to this Jacqueline who had ever been kept from any touch of sin?

The wrinkled grandam watched. There was only one course open now. No force was left. Subterfuges, evasions, the finesse and trickery of a beautiful girl—that was the only course of salvation!

Jacqueline put out her hand laying the tips of her fingers upon the tattooed fist McCorkle had thrust before her. That gesture had been taught her well. Perhaps she did it now through an instinctive fear, as one might avoid recoiling from a dangerous looking dog who is licking one's hand.

McCorkle, of course, steaming like a tremendous side of pork, mocked the prescribed gesture of a courtier and kissed her fingers.

Instead of withdrawing her hand, the girl said sweetly: "Monsieur is so *gentil*!"

"I'm what?"

Parson, who was part Cajan, interpreted: "The mademoiselle is shinin' up to you, captain."

One side of McCorkle's mouth grinned.

"Be yourself, gal! Be yourself! Come over here—and set down. We'll have a drink together. Ay—no? Still clinging to that sea-cook? Clutchin' his sleeve agin—ay? Don't do that. Don't be a barnacle to a sinkin' ship. You see this here candle?" She saw his thumb with its thick nail, like a turtle-shell. "When that candle burns down to here your gentleman-friend will sink!" McCorkle flopped into his chair. "Don't be a barnacle! Cast off there!"

The girl came alone to the table.

"Set down here next to me!"

She obeyed. McCorkle turned to Cameron with an expression of grim amusement.

"Now then, skipper, we'll leave you watch the proceedings. I want you over there abaft them candles with the light on your face—so's you can see 'em burn!" He called to the impatient Wing: "Here you droolin' lubber fasten this gentleman's arms to that there stanchion." He pointed to one of the posts of the grand staircase.

Tim Holloway watched this unspeakable humiliation of his heroic master.

"You lay a hand on him, you swob-head," he yelled to Wing, "and I'll tear out your liver with me bare hands!"

"So ho!" McCorkle bellowed in laughter—"the little cabin-boy agin, ay? Stands up for his skipper! Damned fine! If you're that sort, me little squawlin' terrier, I'll make you Captain McCorkle's cabin-boy!"

What a sacrilege! Tim shook his whitened fist. "Think I'm goin' to be *your* cabin-boy, you blowsy scrufter?" he cried. "You ain't no captain—lest it's for some tidewater flat boat! *There's* my captain—and it's from him Tim Holloway will take orders—not for no blunt-bowed saggin' bargeman the likes of you!"

McCorkle's humor was slightly irritated. "Very well then—if you're his cabin-boy you can join him. Wing, make this little yapdoodle fast again that other stanchion. One on each side of that there companionway.

Wing obeyed, taking the kicking, clawing Tim by the scruff of the neck and tying him on the corresponding post on the opposite side of the grand stairway.

McCorkle looked around. There was still one other person who had not been properly disposed of—the old chatelaine.

"Madame," he said with mock graciousness. "Bein' you're a perfect lady—and well on in years—I don't want to shock you with the sight of what's goin' to happen. Suppose you stow yourself in that there closet till the storm's blow'd over."

"In there, monsieur!" the grandam exclaimed. She saw Jacqueline pale with anger at this indignity, and she saw Wing and Dorset approach to force her in if she disobeyed.

"Who are you, monsieur, to give me this order?" she asked in a blaze of wrath.

"He's a blitherin' pot-bellied sea cook!" Tim Holloway cried from his post.

"Stow that gaff!" McCorkle roared. "Bind that kid athwart his mouth with his bandanna! He's gettin' me crazy!"

Parsons carried out this order, removing the crowning pirate touch of Tim's figure—the bandanna swathed about his skull—and wrapping it across his mouth.

"There—that's better!" McCorkle said with considerable relief. "He don't look so brave now—but he sounds better!" He turned to the chatelaine: "You still layin' to? Thought I told you to git!"

"I will go, monsieur," the old woman said proudly—fearing the humiliation of being handled by Wing and Dorset. "But do not forget, monsieur, for whatever you do in this house, you will have to account to them!" She pointed to the hovering and watchful ancestors, and then passing the door which Wing opened for her, she submitted to her imprisonment.

McCorkle was now in a position to enjoy himself. The old chatelaine and her servant were safely stowed away in a closet; Cameron was bound to a post on one side of the grand staircase, with the gagged little urchin on the other. The only inmate of the household now who was neither bound nor imprisoned was the girl.

The first desire in McCorkle's mind was to impress this girl with his bravado and deviltry, what better way to do this than to give her the supreme thrill of seeing Cameron shot down? McCorkle wiped the sweat out of his eyes.

"You see that gentleman over there?" he asked pleasantly. "Look at him sharp because you'll see somethin'! It'll be a show worth seeing—this derelict ship settlin'. Always a great sight to see the last minutes of a wreck. And in particular if this young skipper is your—" McCorkle's eyes narrowed— "Tell me this first: is he your man?"

It was of course a time to lie. Cameron knew it. The girl herself knew it. She must not turn McCorkle's drunken jealousy upon Cameron, when but a moment before it had blazed so hysterically upon the octroon, Parson.

"How can that be, *monsieur*?" she asked blandly.

"Then what is he to you?"

"To me? How can he be anything to Jacqueline, *monsieur*?"

"Then what the devil is he doing in this house? I thought they was only three people in this house. How come he breezes in with all sails set and tries to stick me up?"

Jacqueline recalled the sinister suggestion McCorkle had made about torturing the inmates of the house into divulging the hiding place of the Raiglon treasure. From this at least she could save Cameron.

"I have never seen this man before this very moment, *monsieur*."

This seemed to break a terrific tension.

McCorkle lit his pipe and puffed a cloud of strong smoke.

"Never seen him afore this—ay? H'm! Well, how come then he wanted to shoot us all down?"

"He came out of the swamps, *monsieur*," the girl said masterfully. "Probably a devil—such as they say haunts this place."

McCorkle chuckled knowingly. "Very likely! Except that I had a go with him—up there on the landin', and found he was made of flesh and bones and good hard muscle. It's likely he's a devil out'n the swamps. Oh, yes! He's a devil, all right!"

"Beggin' your pardon, captin'," Dorset said in his soft humble voice, "I don't want to interrupt yer conversation with the lydy; but I got some information on that very point. Wing comes to me when I was aboard the lugger, sayin' as how you wanted me. I comes, hides behind that 'angin, and I fires at this here gentleman in question. You know how I shoots, captin'. Never misses, I don't. It's my opinion that I got him in the mouth—and that it didn't phase him."

McCorkle bellowed in laughter.

"Oh, yuss, larf!" Dorset forgot his humility. "But you don't know wot happened to me afore Wing fetched me. I was on the lugger waitin' in the mist, when out'n the swamps there comes a pirate like them pictures on the walls. Rises, y'might say, floatin' toward me. And then, s'help me God, he jumps me! Yuss, devils can tear you up same as any humans. Leastwise this one could. Then bindin' me 'ands, he goes below, rifles the lockers of cartridges, comes above, and by that time a fore-and-aft rigged vessel comes sailin' out'n the dark with the little cove aboard—the snipe as I've just locked up behind this door. That's wot's happened to *me*, captin', since I seen you larst. And all-in-all, it looks like wot this here gel says is right.

You're dealin' wiv the devil hisself, if I know anything."

"I ain't listenin' to no hophead's yarn," McCorkle sneered. "If the man's cruisin' around here with that pirate rig on he can trick drunks and women—but not ole McCorkle. He swiped that ammunition from us, did he? Well, I'll do a little swipin', too. I'll give him a swipe with a bit of lead athwart his guts!"

"You can not harm him!" the girl said in a calm voice.

"What the hell!" McCorkle cried turning to her. "Can't harm him—ay? I'll show you—"

"He's invulnerable!" she said.

"Oh, yes! Invulnerable! No doubt about that!" McCorkle laughed. "But you just look here. Do you see this here hand of mine?" He held up a pistol with the muzzle pointed directly across the table toward Cameron's chest. "Is my hand trembling?" The girl saw the thick leathery skin drawn tightly across his knuckles. A dragon was tattooed on it—writhing in the thick hair.

"Not a shiver to that hand, is there, me gal? One little touch of that trigger finger and your devil sinks back to hell's fire where he hails from! Look here—are you watchin'?" I squeeze the trigger slow—without movin' another muscle in me hand! Look at me, I tell you. Why the hell don't you look?"

He watched the girl through the corners of his eyes. McCorkle wanted an audience for this dramatic ceremony. He was inherently a conceited man, this fat, lumbering waterfront drunk. He liked the adulation of his henchmen. And they supplied the demand. He liked the adulation of women—any women—but particularly one like this girl beside him. He was strutting for her. The prairie cock was lifting his feather tufts, raising his tail, spreading and drooping his wings. But the girl—in the manner of prairie hens, was uninterested! At least she was uninterested in him!

McCorkle's eyes bulged till they turned yellowish. What was she doing? Actually smiling—her lips curling, her white cheeks dimpling—a smile that reflected all the seduction, the witchery, the wiles, ever used

by a Raiglon woman—or any woman in the history of the world!

It was a smile that any man would have died for—but McCorkle saw that it was not bestowed upon him!

It was bestowed upon that man whom McCorkle hated more than any one else in the world—the octoroon!

And the octoroon was reciprocating in dumb and fearful adoration.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“FIGHT FOR ME.”

A FLAME had been kindled—slow but consuming—a flame that would spread if not with rapidity, with certainty of enveloping everything it touched. The egoistic brute man, childish and cruel, was afire with those two passions either one of which could have made him mad in his drink—the passions of love and hate.

As if standing too close to that fierce heat, the octoroon, a sensual and slow-thinking man, caught fire. The girl was staring at him, her forehead blushing, her eyes shining. Astonishing, of course—but then again, why was it? Was it not possible—so Parson reflected—that this girl saw something in him which all other women had missed? She was a savage little creature, no doubt, of a savage race, kept away from all contact of men and civilization. Of the men there—Parson, McCorkle, Wing, Dorset and that fellow in the ridiculous pirate garb—who would be the one most likely to appeal to a woman of her nature? A man of stature and strength, a man with the swarthy complexion of those paintings on the wall; in other words—Parson himself!

He had a claim upon the girl. She invited it. He would not stand by—without fighting.

McCorkle looked up at him. The chief was seated, gun in hand, leaning across the table. Parson was standing, not far away from the prisoner, Cameron. Yes, the flame was slow, venomous, spreading, like the blue flame which spreads across spilled alcohol. It went up into the octoroon's peculiar slate-colored eyes.

McCorkle saw the light there. It was a new experience to be glared at thus by a half-breed, because of the smile of a white woman.

That smile under ordinary circumstances would have meant little—perhaps nothing. But in this situation it meant everything. The girl was helpless—the prey of any one of the four renegades who wanted to take the trouble to pack her off to the lugger. To old Wing this was, of course, the limit of folly. As soon as he saw the girl he knew that trouble was coming. It generally came after the loot was divided. In old days it was a mere matter of casting dice for some screaming, clawing Mexican wench, and that was all there was to it. But here apparently their chief McCorkle had forgotten all about the business at hand which was to get Cameron out of the way, and then ransack the house. Parson also had forgotten the main issue. Both men were glaring at each other in a duel of glances, the ferocity of which that old sea-dog Wing had never seen equalled in his sixty years of piracy.

Yes, McCorkle was going to shoot his henchman Parson down. There was little doubt about that. Parson himself saw it. And McCorkle knew that he saw it!

That was the trouble. The hulking brute, sitting there with his ponderous greasy elbow on the ancient linen tablecloth, and a six-gun balanced in his hand, was afraid. Parson, having been set as the particular guard over the dangerous Cameron—was standing also with a gun in hand!

“Parson, from the look in your eye, which I ain't never seen there afore to-night, I figures you're aimin' for to pull off somethin' powerful impolite.”

“I reckon you ain't callin' me a kinky-headed swine agin, sir?” Parson said.

Wing shook his head excitedly. Dorset let out a low groan as if some one had kicked him. Cameron stood with arms folded, still facing death at the point of McCorkle's gun. His heart leaped within him, but no change of expression came to his face. In the moment's silence a silvery laugh came from the throat of Jacqueline.

McCorkle tensed every muscle. The laugh had cut into him like a dagger.

The octoroon echoed the laugh—breathlessly—showing a gleam of even white teeth through his thick lips.

"You reckon I ain't doing what?" McCorkle almost whispered.

"I said I reckoned you ain't callin' me a kinky-headed swine again."

"Oh, I ain't, ain't I? Well, maybe I am!"

"I don't hear you."

Never was there a more beautiful obbligate than Jacqueline's laugh offsetting the husky whisper, the guttural taunt.

"It comes to me mind, Parson, that you been gettin' a better balance on that 'er weapon which you holds in your hand. When you got a nice holt, ready to smash me, you'd like for me to call you some-thin', wouldn't you now? So's you'd have an excuse to shoot down your chief?"

"I don't hear you callin' me nothin', sir."

"Be careful not to move that thar gun, Parson. My hand's ready. You've seen this here hand of mine juggle afore this many a time?"

"My own hand ain't exactly like molasses, sir."

McCorkle's breath came in puffs. His forehead beaded with blinks of sweat. A silvery laugh was ringing within him, vibrating, shaking some nerve excruciatingly, as a sound wave will shake a taut wire. He was going to show that girl how he treated his men. He had wanted to perform for her—showing her what punishment he could inflict when there was the slightest infringement upon his rule or dignity. And now he was given a chance—more than he had bargained for.

It was his uppermost motive—to show her. But here when the chance offered, he found that detestable half-breed facing him with a gun, and actually taunting him.

And the girl was laughing!

Without taking his eye from the octoroon, he said: "Wing, shag over there alongside of him, and frisk his gun."

"Why do you order him to do that, chief?" Parson asked loudly, menacingly. "Disarm me? For why? Will I stand here and leave you pump lead into me—just to show that thar *mademoiselle* how brave you

are? Hell no! Show her how you can shoot down this gentleman—" he nodded to Cameron—"but not how you shoot down Parson!"

"You will give your gun to Wing, Parson," McCorkle said quietly. That tone was always obeyed in past arguments. "I figure you want to take a little pot at me—which delays our evenin's work. Surrender your gun—or I'll call it mutiny."

The octoroon found himself in a quandary. His master was resorting to an authority which for many years had been respected not only by Wing and Dorset, but by Parson himself.

"'Tain't mutiny, sir," Parson said in a totally different voice. "It'd be plain murder if I gives this here gun up. They's too many prisoners here which had order been shot long afore this. Why the hell don't you shoot some of *them*? No, you want for to shoot me, sir—because of that woman. High yaller you calls me, don't you? Creole, that's what I am! And I ain't yaller in the guts—like some tidewater skippers. This here gun stays in my hand, for to protect myself agin *you*, chief."

Wing did not step too close to the octoroon in his first intent to obey McCorkle's order. He found himself, however, in the position of a mediator.

"Did we-all come to get treasure, mates, or did we come here to knife each other over some flat-footed woman. Which a woman spells shipwreck no matter who nor where nor when! I knew damned well what sort of weather was makin', chief, when you got soused and we found a gal in the house! Well and good! I'm satisfied. The gal—she belongs to you, chief."

He turned to Parson, shaking his bony finger at the blue lips, the tightened eyes. "You hear what I'm sayin', Parson? That ain't because you're part negro, no sir. I ain't intimatin' that. It's because the chief allus gets first choice of the women. Not only in our gang, but in every gang in the world. That's settled. She's hisn—and good riddance if she got stowed away somewhere afore a typhoon blows us all to hell!"

This speech was extraordinarily successful in relieving the deadly tensi-ty. Dorset

relaxed perceptibly. Parson and the chief shrugged their shoulders, muttered oaths, looked at each other as if waiting to see who would put away his gun first.

But there was one other person in the room who refused to accept Wing's speech as a solution. Jacqueline was turning over a phrase or two of that cracked old voice: "She's hisn—That's settled—The chief always gets the first choice—"

She spoke up calmly. Her voice seemed to come in what had been a momentary lull in a storm.

"*I am not his,*" she said.

McCorkle's hand fell, so that the gun thwacked loudly on the table. "What's this?" he cried. "You say you ain't mine? Well, damn me, if that ain't a hot one! I'll show you if you're mine or not!"

"By what right, *monsieur*, do I belong to any one else—but to them?" She pointed to the Raiglon portraits.

"Say, look here, lady," McCorkle said as if speaking to a stupid little child, "you don't seem to get the idea of this party. We ain't guests—like you seem to be pretendin'. We're outlaws. We didn't come here to no pink-tea party. We came for to strip this house of anything that's worth a Mexican peso. And there ain't goin' to be anythin' left of the house—no, nor any humans neither—when we're through! Oh, yes, *you'll* be left. *You* don't have to worry about bein' shoved off into them lilies—not you!"

Jacqueline did not seem to be worried about her fate. Nor for that matter did the murderous threats of the chief seem to horrify her. The rifling of the house and the massacre of its occupants seemed to be a more or less plausible course of events to this Raiglon daughter. Of course she did not condone it. But back there in her subconscious mind, it seemed a very natural procedure.

"In that case," she said sweetly, "I belong to the most courageous man."

"Now you're talkin'!" McCorkle roared, banging the tablecloth with his fists. "That's more like it! To the most courageous, wow! Them's your words, is it? 'Most courageous'—which is me!"

"It is possible, *monsieur*," Jacqueline re-

plied. "But what glorious deeds have you committed to prove that?"

McCorkle chuckled. "I don't like to cast any bouquets at myself, lady. You ax Captain McCorkle what he's committed, do you? Well, that's hard to answer. To tell just what crimes I ain't committed would be a easier way of answerin' that there question."

"*Monsieur* will permit me to suggest that crimes may be either courageous or cowardly. So I have been taught by my *grand-mère*."

"B'God there ain't two ways about the crimes McCorkle commits!" the chief shouted drunkenly.

"If you stood up and fired upon a man who is himself armed—" the girl suggested craftily—

"Ay, what!" the other muttered in surprise. "Damn me if I ain't stood up against a dozen men who was armed—"

"Yes, because many men are slow and imperfect in their aim," the girl admitted. "*Monsieur* was not afraid when that *petit* whom you have imprisoned in the closet—shot at you and your men. But there are men who are quick and dangerous—" she added deftly—"such as that one!" She looked again at the hateful and arrogant octoroon.

McCorkle swallowed this. He had no desire to resume that humiliating duel of eye and word, with the half-breed. The half-breed was "dangerous and quick" as the girl had said. Parson and McCorkle had a desperate respect for each other's speed and accuracy. That little score would be settled later. Meanwhile each man could bide his time.

"Why should I fire on a pal of mine?" McCorkle asked, smiling through trembling lips.

"Ah, yes, you are the *gentil* chief!" the girl said. "And yet I have a grave question in my mind as to which of you two *gentilhommes* is the braver!"

"Well damn you for the sassy little bat that you are, I'll show you how brave old McCorkle is! I'll shoot down everyone in this house—here and now. I'll shoot down the devil himself, if he came down and sat at this here table!"

"Yes, *monsieur*," the girl taunted, "if the devil were disarmed!"

The blood went to McCorkle's eyes. He lurched forward, emitting a string of foul epithets, which he now directed upon this new object of his rage—the girl. As he reached for her with both hands as if to rend her to pieces, his eye fell upon a threatening and dangerous looking figure.

Although bound, Cameron stood straining at his post, the muscles of his neck knotting, veins swelling as if at any moment he might free himself, leap across the table and try his luck in a combat of bare hands against four men who were armed.

McCorkle strained his eyes, as if the vision were not clear to him. In the last few moments of violent emotional crises, he had completely forgotten this young, weed-slimed, pirate-clad athlete. The girl's hands were gripping McCorkle's wrist. He felt them—incredibly smooth, soft.

"You forget," she said. "that the devil is not armed."

"Ha! True enough!" the baffled and fuming chief cried. "You was leadin' up to that, wasn't you! You little minx! You damned glib-tongued charmer! I'm a coward if I shoot down me enemies—that's it, ain't it? Got to give 'em a chanst! Well I guess damned well not! I'll leave Dorset plug him, when the time comes. It does Dorset good to do my shootin'. Always makes him think he's powerful ornery. Gits his nerve back for him. McCorkle settled back comfortably.

The girl breathed heavily after that long period of withholding her breath. "As for you, lady," the chief resumed, "I reckon you'll want me to prove I'm your man by some ways else than shootin' down this Mr. Puss-in-boots, a-standin' there made fast to that stanchion."

"Yes," the girl replied with an attempt at indifference. "By standing up before some one, *monsieur*, who is armed. There is the honor of duelling for a girl's hand—in which case neither side has an advantage in arms. If you want my hand, fight duels for me! Thus, my *grandmère* taught me, are ladies of our blood won or lost."

"Well, I won't back out of no proposi-

tion like that!" McCorkle said with a swagger. "Never refused a fair fight in my life—nor a foul one for that matter. Who do you want me to bump off?"

"That man!"

Again McCorkle found himself face to face with Parson.

"Why that man?" McCorkle managed to sneer. "Duel with him? He's a black."

"He is great of stature," the girl said, "and he is swarthy of complexion—even as my forefathers whose faces were bronzed by the sea—"

"This cook's face was bronzed by some negro grandmother," McCorkle said.

Now that Parson's gun was in his holster, the chief was not constrained to choose his words so carefully.

"Nevertheless, *monsieur*," the girl insisted, "there is something about this lieutenant of yours which I am unable to describe. I see in him something that is at once graceful and savage—which I fail to find in the rest of your band, even—if you will pardon me, *monsieur*—in yourself."

That was enough. McCorkle was ready to fight anybody—and with any weapons. His one regret was that he could not have a nobler opponent to shoot down than this smirking, kinky-haired, long-armed gorilla who had never had a girl smile upon him before in his life.

"Come on then, damn you for a hell-brewin' catamount! I'll kill anybody—even a half-breed—and with me bare fists, if you want it thataway!"

"With swords," the girl said.

"Swords—hell!" McCorkle cried. "That black's too good at anything resemblin' a razor. Fists is what I says!"

"If not swords," Jacqueline said, "then let it be a duel with pistols."

"That ain't bad either!" McCorkle consented.

It was high time now—if the outcome of past arguments had any bearing—for the octoroon to lose his nerve. There was the tremendous psychological balance favoring McCorkle—the balance between captain and deckhand, white man and half-breed. McCorkle was a master bully. Parson had a good yellow streak. But in this situation both men were aflame. The girl had en-

raged one by her laughing and made the other think he could win her. Fear was crowded out.

"I'm willin'," Parson said with considerable dignity. "We'll make it a duel—as between two gentlemen, sir."

"Oh for hell's sake!" McCorkle snorted. "Between me and a rotten octoroon! That's the kind of a duel we'll have!"

"Don't be shootin' each other up, chief!" Wing pleaded. "We've got a good job on our hands. Don't hash it just because you run afoul of a woman! Git her out'n the way, and we'll collect our swag!"

"Let 'em go to it—the two balmies!" Dorset tittered out of the side of his gray lips. "Let 'em do each other in—all the more in it for you and me!"

This was just the answer to Wing's objection. Very well then, let the chief and the half-breed have it out. One less to divide the loot!

"If you're goin' to settle your bally troubles, do it quick!" Dorset advised.

"Here I am guardin' your prisoners for you—which I've arf a mind to chuck the job. Standin' here ready to be knifed any minute while you two swell around like two lords—orl for the sake of that spunky little baggage! 'Op to it, I says!"

"Sure, hop to it! Them's my sentiments!" McCorkle cried. "Win the lady by fair means—that's my way. Steal her? No, sir! Not me! Win her like a gentleman—"

"Yes—like a gentleman!" the octoroon said dramatically.

"Who the hell said *you* were a gentleman!" the other snorted. "They's only one Creole in this here dool! Come on! All hands stand by! Wing, you watch this here sea-cook, that he don't jump us when we turn our backs to him." He lurched out to the center of the floor. Parson saw that the hulking bully was half seas under. A gun duel, properly regulated, could scarcely be fatal to a sober man.

"I'm ready, sir," the octoroon said pompously.

"Oh, you're ready are you? Ready for hell—that's the right way to put it. Come on! Back up sternwise. Keep your hand away from the holster till you take ten

paces, come about and then—if you ain't already luffed up into hell, you can fire!"

McCorkle's commands were obeyed; in fact the duel materialized almost to the extent of that final implication. The girl, following his order dropped a napkin. Cameron stood bound on one side of the staircase, the boy on the other. Wing watched with his white head nodding like the pendulum of a clock in time to their steps. Dorset's eyes shone with an unhealthy and ghastly pleasure. He hated and feared and was bullied by both men. What a triumph to see them eager to kill each other! Whichever one fell, Dorset was glad. Whichever one fell—it was the girl's victory!

"Ten steps." McCorkle himself had made that stipulation. The gentleman half-breed had agreed to everything. A high-born lady was to be his prize if he won. He was fighting an intoxicated man—that in itself a coward's move. It seemed like a certain, and glorious victory.

It might have been a victory for the octoroon if McCorkle had made it an affair of honor instead of a murderous farce. When the chief had covered half the distance, walking with a dramatic stagger toward the grinning Dorset, he turned. It might have been Dorset's grin that made him mad. Yet this is to be doubted. It was more probable that he had planned the whole miserable travesty of honor from the first. He took five steps, wheeled suddenly, and with a drunken reel fired.

Jacqueline suppressed a scream. Cameron leaned forward straining at the straps which were holding him back. He would have torn the hulking bully to pieces; and yet it was his sustained conviction that everything must take its course. He knew enough to stay out of this fight. Like every one else there, he had nothing to lose, and much that might be gained.

The victim—the "Creole gentleman" who had aspired to the hand of a Creole lady and lost—staggered as if he himself had drunk too much of the chatelaine's hot liqueurs. His gun dropped. He gripped his shoulder. His arm flickered like a broken wing as he reached to grasp the outstretched arm of an inscrutable and ghostly personality—a suit of mail. McCorkle had

said the half-breed could fire if he had a chance before being "bumped into hell." That was the truth of the whole matter, except that the octoroon was not killed. He swayed, staggered forward as if automatically going through the process of taking his ten steps, turning and firing. But he could not lift the empty hand.

Instead he fell face forward.

McCorkle warmed his cold palm with the gun-barrel—a comforting feeling. He turned to the girl—his flat huge face, flushed but sheepish in victory.

"Did you see that?" he asked rubbing the barrel in the manner of a man rubbing his hands in a satisfied way. "A good dool now—waren't it? Ay, what? Didn't you like it? What did you want? Ain't you smilin'? I won, didn't I? Look at him lyin' there groanin'. Tryin' to roll over. What—he didn't turn? Why not? I said to turn after five steps. Didn't I say five steps, Dorset?"

"I thought you said—" Dorset checked himself, grinning. "Sure you said, five, captin'! 'Eard you with me own ears."

"You said ten steps, *monsieur*," Jacqueline spoke up softly but unable to hide a scathing contempt for this sort of combat.

"Ten was it?" McCorkle exclaimed. "Holy cripes! Ten—! Thought I said five steps! *What* a mistake—phooey! Well, well—I took five and he was takin' ten! Well, well! Anyways that's the reason I didn't kill him; I seen him standin' on, on the same tack y' might say. So I plugged him in the shoulder. Kept him from smashin' away at me. No, don't give him a swig, Wing. He's all right lyin' to. He won't be snortin' around so much. Leave him lie to for a spell."

"Ought 'ave done him in, I say," Dorset was whining. "Yer'll have more trouble than ever wiv him, now that yer've give him somethin' real to grieve abaht. Finish the job, I say."

"That ain't my way," McCorkle said magnanimously. "Now that I've got him on his back, I forgives him. *That's* my way. But bein' he might be rememberin' the grievance—and turnin' it over in his mind for to do me hurt, we'll keep his gun for awhile. Keep temptation out of his

way—as the saying goes. Here, Dorset. You're a particular friend of the half-breed; you keep his gun for him. That's fair."

Dorset accepted the weapon eagerly. "Oh, yes, captin'! I'm a particular friend of Mr. Parson, I am! I'll see that he behaves. I'll put a stop to his hanky-panky! I'm thankin' yer, captin'!"

Jacqueline had knelt down by the side of the wounded man and put a glass of sherry to his lips.

"Now then, my gal!" McCorkle said impatiently. "Is there any more dools you want me to fight for you?"

"Before God, no, *monsieur*!" the girl exclaimed. "This is enough!"

"Enough? You're satisfied I've won you? You don't want me to bump off any one else then—for the sake of winnin' you?"

"*Monsieur*! You have won this duel! It is enough. You are the bravest. There is no more necessity to prove that!"

McCorkle beamed, his huge flat face scarlet and dripping. And then at the climax of his victory he again caught sight of that intrusive and menacing prisoner whom he had neglected to dispose of. He pointed to Cameron: "How about this cook here, ma'am? Might you'd like me to fight a dool with him?"

"No, no, *monsieur*! He is nothing to me! A stranger who came to this island unbidden. Lock him up, *monsieur*, if you will—as your prisoner. And in doing it you will confer a favor upon my grandmother and myself. But if you consider my own womanly feelings—I beg you not to shoot him down like a dog before my eyes! No duels, *monsieur*. You are supreme in courage. No man can match you."

"I better bump him off anyway," McCorkle grunted with drunken persistence.

"*Monsieur*!" the girl cried, throwing herself between McCorkle and Cameron. "I promised you that if you won me in fair fight, I would be yours. It is enough, *monsieur*. What more do you want? Take the treasures of this house. Take me. But shed no more blood, I beg you, *monsieur*, in God's name!"

The girl was bewitching. McCorkle feasted his eyes upon her flushed face, her dilated, flashing pupils, her luxuriant and

disheveled hair, her excited lips. She was flattering him—a much more engrossing matter than that helpless prisoner.

“Better leave him as he is, chief,” said old Wing, always the craftiest and most cautious. “No use killin’ him yet. Might have use for him. If he’s the girl’s lover I know a good way to use him!” Wing still remembered that ace card—the torturing of prisoners, when there was a possibility of their divulging secrets.

Still McCorkle was engrossed with the vision and the music of that girl pleading with him, flattering him, proclaiming the victor, making violent and immeasurable promises to him. Everything else was shut out of his inflamed consciousness. Even the cracked voice of Wing came as if from another room, another time—inconsequential.

Irritated at any possible interruption to his glorious love affair, McCorkle silenced the old man. “Damn you, Wing, for a bawlin’ ole woman! We’ll leave him live—for a spell.”

Indeed, what did McCorkle care for a disarmed and innocuous stranger like Cameron now?

Wing nodded—perhaps in favor. Dorset stood guard, malignant and gleeful in his power. The octoroon whom he hated and feared was lying in a corner of the big dining hall, nursing his wound.

The girl sank into a chair exhausted, trembling. Her oval face—flushed a moment ago—was now pale, but still vivified with the consciousness of a victory. She raised her face to the six Raiglons above.

As her grandam had prophesied, McCorkle had forgotten to reckon with those six presences.

“All right, chief,” old Wing said, “we’re all set now for you and me to strip the house.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

DORSET ON GUARD.

NO one was more satisfied with the trend of events than McCorkle. His vanity had been tickled, and a balm of pervasive content came over his spirit.

Those very elements which had enraged him had become a source of tremendous satisfaction.

The chatelaine’s liqueur which had excited him, now drugged him. Parson was no longer a taunting and arrogant figure towering in defiance before a splendid tapestry. He was merely a pile of sopped rags, emitting fitful groans and pitiable oaths. At the psychological moment the menacing Parson had been hurled off the stage. It was like whisking away a red zerape from before the eyes of a maddened bull; out of sight, the inciting color was forgotten.

“Yes, high time now, mate, to get the stuff together. Dorset stays guard over the two gentlemen. The old lady and the black won’t do nobody no hurt if they stay in that there glory-hole. Parson stays where he’s at—unless Dorset wants to take a pot at him for fun. And the young *m’moiselle*—” he repeated that grotesque travesty of a knight kissing the hand of a lady—“you’ll stay on deck with Mr. Dorset who’s a gentleman born! When Wing and I finish strippin’ the house, then I’ll come back and we’ll have a weddin’!”

“I have made my promise, *monsieur*,” the girl rejoined convincingly.

“And we’ll want to tap a keg or two!” McCorkle stipulated. “It’ll be one of these here Creole fiestas—nothin’ less—bein’ it’s a weddin’ of a pirate’s daughter!”

The girl watched him take a candle from the iron sconce and reel off toward the stairs. He walked up exaggeratedly erect. The candles from below, as well as that which he held, projecting his shadow in varied directions. Old Wing took another of the candles and hurried off into the adjacent room, his head nodding eagerly.

The five who were left in the room—the girl, Cameron, Tim, the wounded man and Dorset—remained silent at first. There was a strange change in the tensivity of the air, now that McCorkle was gone. The girl had caught a last glimpse of him, as he lurched against the huge oaken door of one of the upper chambers. Wing could be heard in the next room, shambling about, clanking the old locks and chains like a restive ghost.

In the center of the stage now was Dorset with his long ghastly head, and his puny body. Dorset was in the habit of reflecting his master's mood. McCorkle was triumphant and self-satisfied; and so was Dorset. He had just had a considerable measure of power thrust upon him. He was quite self-satisfied—as was McCorkle. The octoroon who had often bullied him and twisted his weak wrists, was now lying in the depths of ignominy and helplessness. Wounded and disarmed he presented no menace to the ordinarily apprehensive Dorset. The only other sources of danger existed in the two bound prisoners and a frail girl. The closet was securely bolted upon the chatelaine and old Quintilian. Dorset was satisfied.

He represented the giant McCorkle. He now was the bandit chief, the conqueror. In fact he understood so well that he was the viceroy in the absence of the king that immediately upon McCorkle's leaving the room Dorset strutted over to that cathedral chair, and flopped into it.

The chair swallowed him. All the girl could see was the long haggard face, the bony forehead, the huge grinning mouth. The solid arm of the chair hid his body, but Jacqueline saw the thin nervous hand placed upon the cowl of a carven monk.

Dorset's mouth—out of all proportion to the narrow face—widened until she saw the clot of blood in the corner—the result of that blow dealt him by his master when on the lugger. The grin widened interminably; the bruised lips pulled across his teeth, until he broke into a chuckle.

"Parson stays where he's at!" he was laughing as if to himself. "That's what old Mac says! 'Unless Dorset, who's a gentleman born, wants to 'ave a bit o' fun!' Didn't you 'ear him say that? Cricky, but that's a good one! Yuss I *am* a gentleman—slop me gob!" he cried belligerently turning to the girl, as if he had heard a tinkle of a laugh. She was sitting at the table scarcely an arm's length across that yellow linen from him. "A gentleman born, that's wot! Englishman. Born and bred in Lunnon! Oh, yes, I've had these here sherry nightcaps, too—" He tossed one off and made an attempt to belch like his master.

Blood came to his head—to his eyes, and to the end of his nose giving him a splotchy, unhealthy appearance. "Look here, me gel! You can tell a blood when yer sees one?"

"I can, *monsieur*."

"You can tell a man 'as done a bit of travelin' in his day?"

"That I can most certainly, *monsieur*."

"Do I look like a rotten ole tramp—as that man lyin' there?"

"By no means, *monsieur*."

"Or like Wing?" he asked hotly. "By Wing I mean that dodderin' balmy whose 'ead keeps swingin' like this!" He closed his eyes and wagged his own grinning, haggard head. "And as for McCorkle!" Dorset shook his fragile grimy fist. "Pha-ah! Thinks he can swell around here like he was to the manner born—as the sayin' goes! A big sweatin' blowsy bargeman! That's orl he is! We Englishmen you know, go in for blood—ancestors and orl that! You've got it. I can see them portraits up there—every one of 'em has something which you've got on your fice, s'help me. And that ole gel in there actin' as your chaperone—she's got it! And here comes a ole rozzer like McCorkle wantin' to grab you! And that ain't arf of it; he wants to *marry* you—that's wot! Won't be satisfied, I tell yer, till he can say he's a Creole! Creole is he? Ph-tht!"

He paused as if his weak body had spent itself in this tirade. The bound Cameron glowered with a terrific contempt. The wounded man off there in the corner of the dim room groaned out a series of vituperative oaths. The "ghost" in the next room was clanking locks, gathering loot.

But Jacqueline—so Dorset noticed very definitely—was looking at him with a responsive, a sympathetic fire.

"Looke 'ere!" Dorset thrust his ghastly head over the splendid linen. "You tell me—cross yer 'eart! Did you notice a difference between me and them three clods?"

"Beyond the shadow of a doubt, *monsieur*!"

Dorset emitted a sharp quick snarl like a cat spitting. "Ya-a-ah! I knew it! Yer goin' to try and come it with me! I

knew it when I first sat in this chair—yuss, me lydy!” He shouted in a thin voice that seemed scarcely to carry beyond that table. “I thought so! Goin’ to truck wiv me—same as you did with *him*! But he was ’arf seas under—McCorkle was—and I ain’t. He wanted to Rotten Row it like a Creole—and so he swallowed your gaff. You promised him yourself—and he believed it—the poor softy! But not me! You ain’t no little goer, me gel! I knows a little goer when I sees one! But *you* ain’t. You’ll stick a knife acrost him first bloomin’ charnce you git! Don’t tell me! Don’t smile at me, me gel! I won’t be put upon. You’re tryin’ to undo the bally lot of us by your wiming’s wiles—but I’ve ’ad my lesson with wiming—long afore this—damn you orl—’ot ones and cold alike!”

Jacqueline remained calm and unmoved under this gush of invective. She was studying him—his agile thin fingers, his grimaces, his bubbling mouth, his narrow-set triumphant, twinkling eyes. She looked at him with the passive amusement of a little girl watching a jumping-jack, as if trying to discover what string was being pulled to cause such comical antics.

Wing had shambled into the room, his arms full of altar cloths, silver sconces, a censer, a chalice, an ornate compass. He heaped these antiques upon the table, his eyes gleaming, his chest heaving.

Dorset waited, wrinkling his pimpled forehead in a frown, as if this intrusion of Wing with his loot were a personal affront. The old seaman shuffled out, nodding his white head affirmatively, as if to say: “Yes, there’s lots more. It’s endless. The quicker I go for it, the more we’ll have!”

“Think you can truck wiv me, do you!” Dorset went on muttering at the girl, finding a tremendous exhilaration in scolding and bullying something weaker than himself. “Ya-ah! Good mind to clump yer one in the mouth. A good mind to—Yuss, I said I’ve a—”

He spoke tonelessly, disconnectedly as if trying to say one thing while thinking another.

“I won’t be put upon—not me.” He was not looking at the girl now although there was the same grimace—compounded

of a vicious frown and an insolent smirk. His look was focused on something just as fascinating.

That pile of stuff which Wing had heaped upon the table seemed to grow in luster with each moment that Dorset stared at it. Certain details—a jewel on the chalice, a band of gold on the sconce, a cluster of semiprecious stones on the altar cloth—caught Dorset’s eye. The heap of antiques placed there on rich yellowed linen seemed to kindle into a dull glow under the candle light. Dorset blinked. And as he blinked succinct rays of green and yellow light radiated from the heap, as if there were buried flames in a mass of embers.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIVE—AND THE ONE.

“THEY are merely heirlooms, *mon-sieur*,” Jacqueline said. “There is no other worth to them.”

Dorset had left his cathedral chair and was now examining the stuff which old Wing had brought.

It was ridiculous to suppose that Wing would have left anything of real value on that table. If he had found a jewel that could have been classed as precious he would have pocketed it himself. Dorset knew, of course, that Wing had examined everything he had left there. That was the reason he had taken so long a time in collecting one handful of loot. McCorkle was taking a still longer time—an indication that he was meeting with more success.

“The gel’s right!” he said disgustedly. The stuff heaped on ancient linen, illumined by soft candle beams, had looked more precious than it was. It was flamboyant, and, further, it kindled the imagination. “Heirlooms—is it! And so it is, b’God! Good for the museums back in N’Orleans—if you can sell it to ’em. The real stuff Wing keeps! And this here truck is what I gits—while Wing and McCorkle rifles the ’ouse!”

“It is worth nothing, *monsieur*—this heap,” Jacqueline said, “except as heirlooms. To us they mean much—to you they are worthless.”

"Ain't no doubt about that, old gel!" Dorset grunted. "Now you can see how I gets treated. The leavin's—that's orl. Nothin' more. Same story every time, s'help me! But I won't be put upon—not me! That 'arf-breed bullied me aht of my share, more'n once. But he won't do it again, strike me dead if he will. Old Wing he's a sharp one, too—but he don't bother me. Minds his business. Too old to bully me. All he cares for is to lay his bloody ole 'ooks on his share. Counts the pennies. Never bothers me. It's this thing on the floor, and—" he lowered his voice malignantly—"and McCorkle."

The girl was still studying that miserable face. "Why is it that all men are afraid of him—this Monsieur McCorkle?—this drunken marauder?"

"There you 'ave it!" Dorset exclaimed. "Marauder—drunk—that's wot! And we all cower before his swank like puppies! Gave me a hell of a flip under the lug a while back. Left me aboard to have a go wiv the blahsted ghosts in the swamp! That's the way he treats me, while he goes after the swag. Then here I am again—a-watchin' of you wimin, and that pile of refuse over there in the corner a-nursin' of his wound—and them two coves tied up there. That's wot I gits. But I won't be put upon—not me—I'll turn one of these days, you can jolly well lay to that, me gel! One of these days Dorset's goin' to turn."

"Turn now—and I will help you," the girl said softly.

Dorset looked at her and laughed hideously. "I suppose you'll be arskin' me for me gun next—ay, wot?"

"No, no! I could not touch a gun. Could Jacqueline handle a gun with these fingers?" She held her palm out—and he seemed momentarily fascinated. It was a beautiful thing—particularly when the soft transparent skin with its inner flame of coursing blood, was compared with gun-metal. "At least Jacqueline herself is not afraid of this great bully of yours."

"Well damn me for a pie-can!" Dorset burst out, "if you think you can shame me—I guess not! I'm scairt stiff of the ole growlin' rozzer. Makes me shiver in every bone of me body! And he's just

abaht broke every bone in me body—wot with his kicks!"

"You are a slave, *monsieur*. You are not an Englishman."

"Orl right. I'm a slave!"

"But you are free from this man—" she pointed to Parson—"who persecuted you."

"I damn well know it!"

"If McCorkle had fallen in that duel—" she suggested.

Dorset's eyes kindled. "Yuss. That would have been a bit of orl right! Either way I won. If McCorkle was aht of the way—" He lost himself a moment in contemplation.

"Would you be a serf any longer, *monsieur*?"

"I guess not! We'd arrange these here jobs to suit ourselves—Wing and me. He's a sharp 'un. The two of us could git rich. This old bleeder, McCorkle, wants to sit dahn and make it a jubilee—when he goes on a maraudin' expedition. Done it afore this—many a time. Likes to git the gels together—and the liquor. Goes in to rob a 'ouse and his mind wanders—imagines he's in a pub. Look at how he's acted here to-night. We'd have had this job finished—arf an hour ago—if Wing and me managed it. I'd have stuck a knife into them two coves there," he pointed to Cameron and Tim, "cast them into the bayou, then stripped the 'ouse. The lydies? Oh, yuss! I'd have drunk your 'ealth and said good-evening. I'm a gentleman when it comes to that!"

"Ah, *monsieur*, that is the truth.. Believe what Jacqueline confesses, *monsieur*. I will tell you everything—my innermost feelings. To what end shall I dissemble? You understand my wishes—my fears. Yes, I want you to raise your hand against this monster whom you fear as I do. This Monsieur McCorkle will harm a defenseless woman. You, a gentleman, an Englishman, will not. I fear him, but I do not fear you. All women, you think, are liars—but why should I lie in this? I fear him, I hate him, I want to see him dead at my feet. When he comes in to claim me—and attempts this horrible thing which he calls a pirate wedding—I shall still make a pretense before him. I shall smile upon him,

and drink, and suffer him to kiss my hand—this hand, *monsieur*."

Again she showed her hand to the distraught Dorset—a hand that was far too beautiful to be kissed by a brute he so despised and hated. "If I do this *monsieur*, and the monster is concerned only with the pleasure of the moment—and forgetful of all danger—then it will be a safe time for some one to slay him!"

"Holy cripes!" was all that Dorset could say. He had no voice. It was a stage whisper, intense, retching, consuming.

"I heard you there! I heard you, by hell!" The hollow moaning voice of Parson from the further corner of the banquet hall broke into the tense periods.

Dorset shivered, and took in his breath with a hissing sound. The girl watched him.

"You 'eard who?" Dorset shot out beligerently. "If you 'eard *me* say anything against the captin', just let me know, and I'll stick a knife acrost you, wivvout another word!"

"I heard her—" Parson whimpered. "She's all right. What she says is good advice. Finish McCorkle—that's the thing to do. She'll help you. You can do it. Don't worry about me. I'm out of the fight. My shoulder's smashed and it's killing me. Go on, finish him! I'll keep quiet and grin!" His voice trailed off into heavy and rhythmic moans.

"How do it? Me! Me kill McCorkle! Oh, my winkie, wot a good one!"

"Are you a coward?" the girl asked sweetly.

He snapped at her: "Yuss, damn me! I'm a coward. Course I'm a coward—the yellowest coward that ever was born! Think I'd try to come it with that—'monster' as you calls him? I guess jolly well I would! Wow! If he ever so much as heard me complain there'd be a plantin'—or a drownin'—that's more like it!"

He seemed to lose himself in thought again, while the girl maintained silence, and the rhythmic moans of Parson came across the room as an obbligate to Dorset's soliloquy.

"He wouldn't bung the word—that rot-

ter down there," he was saying. Evidently he had a terror that the very thought of mutinying against the chief, might in some way leak out. "And 'ow about this here man fastened to the stanchion and frownin' at me? There's the hell of a fine mark to have listenin' to every word—ain't he?"

"Naturally enough I myself want to see him dead!" Cameron protested calmly.

"There you have it, Dorset!" Parson raised his voice again. "There's five of us in here. When McCorkle comes back—he'll be one against five." Parson's voice pleaded with terrific and persuasive gasps.

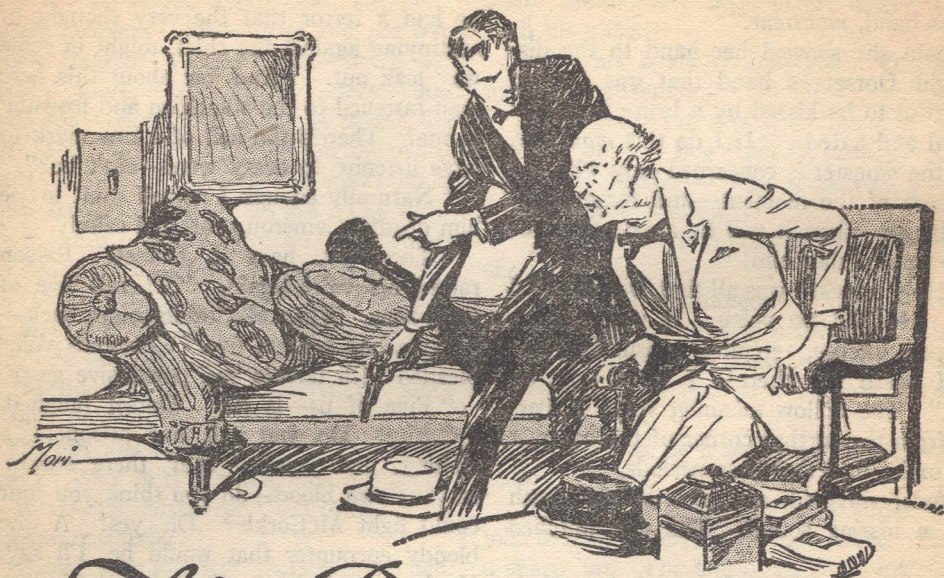
"Five of us—is it?" Dorset laughed. "Cricky! Do you call two prisoners, a wiming, and yourself lyin' there stewin' in your own blood—do you think you four could fight McCorkle? Oh, yes! A fine bloody encounter that would be, I'll say. He done *you* in when you stood up agin him armed. Now 'ow much help are you?"

The sound of a man in the next room, shambling with evident difficulty, grunting, bumping up sharp against the oaken door, interrupted Dorset's tirade. The wounded octoroon struggled up to his elbow, breaking off the rhythm of his moans.

"It's Wing—" the latter said. "He'll help—if the girl knows how to get him. The girl—she's on my side," Parson said, still with a conviction that although she was playing with the others like a cat with mice—she could not possibly be playing with him. "You'll help me get even, *ma'moiselle*? I fought for you—like you wanted? You'll help me?"

Dorset started to jeer—but his sour laughter broke off suddenly. He was concerned with matters of tremendous import. Wing, was coming—Wing, the doddering and crafty, the cautious, the gold-lover.

He blundered through the door, puffing and groaning at the great weight in his arms—an open chest which he had piled with loot. Dorset thrust his head out of his coat like a turtle, and leaned across the linen to the girl. He spoke softly out of the side of his bruised mouth: "Wing—get him on our side. Understand wot I'm s'ying, me gel. *Get Wing on our side*. I'll let you orf."



The Desperate Young Man.

By F. MORTON HOWARD

A SINGLE soft tap on the door disturbed the complete silence of close application in the private office of that old established firm, Stebbings & Mortimer, of Flaming Sword Lane, City. The junior partner frowned at the interruption, but steadfastly continued his study of the big ledger on his desk. The senior partner, without raising his eyes from the mass of correspondence before him, mechanically emitted that loud, inarticulate drone with which it was his habit to accord permission to enter.

Slowly, noiselessly the door opened some eighteen inches, and the face of a mild, middle-aged little man peered around it into the room. Neither partner gave any recognition of his presence, and for a while he remained there, gazing in timid perplexity

from one to the other of the two preoccupied gentlemen.

With every moment of his wait his expression deepened in dubiety until it became one almost of anxious apprehension. Unable at last to bear the embarrassment of his position any longer, he stealthily withdrew his head, silently closed the door, and, after a period of dull hesitation in the passage outside, summed up sufficient courage to rap for a second time with greater force and urgency.

"Come in!" fussed the senior partner impatiently. "Oh, come in, do!"

Again the door opened, and again the mild little face peered round it.

"Well?" jerked the senior partner, glancing up. "Oh, it's you, Chedworth?" he observed not unkindly. "Come in!"

The small, insignificant personality of Mr. George Henry Chedworth sidled through the doorway, but kept hold of the handle of the door as though to maintain a line of escape.

"Well, what is it you want, Chedworth?"

Mr. Chedworth, without replying, gazed in a constrained, apologetic way, first at the senior partner and next at the unheeding junior partner, and next at the floor, where he appeared to find great interest in the pattern of the carpet. The senior partner, taking note of these symptoms, immediately conceived a suspicion.

"If you're thinking about applying for an increase of salary, Chedworth—" he began, crisply.

"Oh, no, sir—not at all!" disclaimed Mr. Chedworth. "Nothing of the sort, sir, I assure you."

"Glad you've more sense than to bother me with things like that," said Mr. Stebbings, mollified. "Well, now, what is it you wish to see me about?"

"Awkward," murmured Mr. Chedworth, fidgeting with the lowest button of his waistcoat. "Hard to explain, sir. Sort of—sort of favor."

Mr. Stebbings, mistrustful of this last word, grunted in an indefinite and somewhat unencouraging way.

"I want to—to give notice—" blurted out Mr. Chedworth.

"Notice?" cried Mr. Stebbings. "Notice of what?"

"Resign," explained Mr. Chedworth, backing a little closer to the door. "I want to give up my job here."

Even as he spoke, the words struck him as crude and ungrateful, and he cast about in his mind for some polite addition to soften the asperity of his announcement. "Been very comfortable here, of course, and so forth and so on," he declared huskily. "Been here a good many years now. Be a bit of a wrench to leave. Still—"

He passed his forefinger round the inner side of his collar and gazed appealingly at Mr. Stebbings. The senior partner sat back and stared at him in an aloof, offended manner. The junior partner flickered a cold glance at Mr. Chedworth, rasped,

"Then why leave?" and straightway resumed his close scrutiny of the ledger.

"I—I been left a fortune," mentioned Mr. Chedworth diffidently.

"What?" barked Mr. Stebbings.

"Been left a fortune," repeated Mr. Chedworth, as though he were making a confession of something of which he was ashamed.

"You—you've been left—" demanded Mr. Stebbings.

He broke off and swung round in his chair to look at the clock on the mantelshelf.

Mr. Chedworth at once comprehended the significance of the action.

"Oh, no, sir—it isn't that!" he interposed hurriedly. "I—I know quite well what I'm talking about. I ain't been anywhere this morning, except—except just to the lawyer's. The chief clerk gave me permission. It—it's quite right, sir. I been left a fortune."

"But, hang it all, Chedworth," protested Mr. Stebbings, with the petulance of one asked to accept the incredible. "You with a fortune!"

"It—it is rum, ain't it, sir?" agreed Mr. Chedworth. "I can't hardly believe it myself, not yet."

"Depends what he calls a fortune," observed the junior partner, poring a little nearer over the ledger.

"Three thousand pounds a year," stated Mr. Chedworth bashfully.

"Three thousand pounds a year?" echoed Mr. Stebbings, in a kind of angry skepticism.

"Rather more, if anything," said Mr. Chedworth apologetically. "Left me by my grandfather's brother. Course I never guessed, sir—"

"Are you sure there isn't some mistake?" interrupted Mr. Stebbings. "It may be a hoax. Have you actually got the money yet?"

"Fixed it up this morning, sir. Finished the last bit of business about it. That's what I got permission to go to the lawyer's for. Been arranging it and settling it all this last three weeks, sir. And now it's done, I can't hardly believe it. I didn't believe it could be true myself. That's why

I never said anything about it before in this office. Didn't want to give 'em a chance to laugh at me. But *now*—"

"But have you actually drawn any money yet?" persisted Mr. Stebbings.

Mr. Chedworth produced a faded old wallet from his breast pocket and opened it to give view of pristine paper contents. "Drew two hundred this morning, as a start," he said. "In fives and tens, and two fifties. No trouble about that?"

"Are you sure they're genuine?"

"I got them straight from the bank, sir."

"Um-m," observed Mr. Stebbings, and appeared to be a trifle disappointed. "Sounds all right," he conceded reluctantly.

"Oh, I know it's all right, sir," asserted the little clerk. "The papers and things I've had to sign! Holford & Jackson, they are the solicitors. Most helpful they've been, sir."

Mr. Stebbings, after a long, brittle pause, rather testily announced that he was jiggered.

"So was I, sir, when I first heard it," eagerly agreed Mr. Chedworth. "And so—so I do hope, gentlemen, you won't take any offense at me wishing to leave? You—*you* see how it is?"

"My grandfather never even had a brother, as far as I know!" Mr. Stebbings stated fretfully as though he were drawing the attention of Providence to an instance of unfair treatment. "Oh, well," he ended magnanimously, and, rising from his seat, held out his hand to the fortunate legatee."

"Very much obliged to you, sir, I'm sure," mumbled Mr. Chedworth, reddening with gratification.

"Congratulate you," said the junior partner, looking up and nodding and looking down again.

"And thank *you*, sir. And—and I shall be sorry to leave the firm."

"We shall be sorry to lose you, Chedworth," said Mr. Stebbings handsomely. "Of course, I suppose you'd like to leave at once, to-day?"

"Thought I'd finish the week out, sir."

"Yes, you *would*!" remarked Mr. Stebbings; and though he did not explain his

meaning more fully, he regarded the mild little man with something like amused affection. "'Pon my word, Chedworth, it's only now that you're going— You've been with us a long time, and you've been a— a faithful servant, Chedworth."

Mr. Chedworth's eyes brimmed. All the long years of drudgery on a grudged, insufficient salary were forgotten in this one moment of frank admission.

"I—I always tried to do my best, sir. Always been my—my motto, so to speak. And I—I dare say you're wondering what I'm going to do with myself in future, sir, now I'm—I'm independent?"

"Launch out a bit, I suppose," put forward Mr. Stebbings. "Theaters, motor car—that sort of thing, eh? Go in for gardening, eh? Conservatory, and all that sort of thing. Have a good time all round."

"Golf," laconically remarked the junior partner, crouched over his desk.

"As a matter of fact—" began Mr. Chedworth awkwardly. "Well—you see, my wife—"

He stopped, shook his head in a puzzled way, and tried a fresh line. "That's—that's where the favor comes in that I mentioned just now," he said. "I—I told her you had taken me from the indoor staff and given me a job as commercial traveler for the firm."

"But—"

"She—she don't know about the legacy. I've thought it all out very careful, sir, and I—I believe I'm acting for the best. I don't want her to know about the money. It 'll—it 'll only spoil everything for her."

"I don't understand, Chedworth. Do you think it's quite fair— I mean—"

"My wife— Well, it's difficult to explain, sir. She's—she's sort of ambitious. And the people she'd meet, on our three thousand a year—they'd snub her. She'd never be comfortable. Always trying to claim her position and getting snubbed. You see what I mean?"

"Out of her element?" said the junior partner.

"Exactly, sir. We'd move to some swell neighborhood, and—and she wouldn't be happy nor comfortable. But if I—if she's got the extra money to spend what she

thinks I'm earning as a commercial, she'll be just right. She'll stay in the suburb where we are. Move to a bigger house, of course, and buy furniture and things. And still be able to queen it among her old friends. She'll like that."

"Sounds quite reasonable," admitted Mr. Stebbings. "But—"

"It won't really be cheating her," contended Mr. Chedworth earnestly. "She'll be able to have all the things she wants. When I told her about the—the commercial traveling job, she was as pleased as pleased. And—well, there's *me*! Sometimes she—well, she's a managing sort of woman, gentlemen. And, if I was a commercial traveler, I'd be away from it all. It would be a rest, a change for me. And of course, the money 'll be there all the time. It 'll be there for the children when I—when the time comes. And, of course, if ever anything's wanted, I can easily make up some sort of story to account for being able to spare the money."

"Well, of course, it's entirely your own affair. You know best," said Mr. Stebbings.

"I do, sir. I know just what it's like at home. And I—I know Mrs. Chedworth. And I honestly believe it's for the best all round. Can but try it for a bit, anyway."

"And you'd be away from home on holiday most of the time?"

"I've earned one! All the years I been married— You don't know!" broke out Mr. Chedworth with a quivering, protesting vehemence that gave the two partners some considerable insight into the conditions of his domestic environment. "Never had a holiday yet—not a real one! Just slog, slog, slog—here *and* at home! Sometimes wished— No rest, no—"

"Come, come, Chedworth!" urged Mr. Stebbings, concerned. "Pull yourself together, man. You mustn't let yourself go, like that."

"Nerves," muttered Mr. Chedworth, in rueful extenuation. "They're all wrong. Overstrained. Never had a chance to ease up. Nagging and—and one thing and another. Not but what she ain't a good wife to me," he asserted. "But—well—"

"Sit down," invited the senior partner. "Tell us a bit more about the legacy and—and so forth. If he wishes, Mortimer, I don't see why we shouldn't help him with the commercial traveling story, do you?"

"Be a charity," grated the junior partner, assiduously turning to the next page in the ledger.

II.

HALF an hour later Mr. Chedworth emerged into the clean, quiet drabness of Flaming Sword Lane. He had quite returned to his usual air of gentle, respectful deference to the world in general, but in his eyes was a little light of expectancy, of half fearful, half eager anticipation. Buttoning his worn coat, he allowed the tips of his fingers to rest momentarily on the bulge of the fat wallet in his breast pocket. He thrilled at the touch of it, and, smiling very cheerfully at an equally cheerful sky, he struck off toward the roaring, rattling thoroughfare which was at the end of the byway.

All was going just as satisfactorily as he could wish. His employers had promised him that they would support to the full his statement about being one of their travelers, should Mrs. Chedworth or any other person show an embarrassing inquisitiveness in the matter at any time. And the partners had persuaded him to begin his holiday at once, and had sent him off with repeated expressions of good will and kindly interest.

It was true that they had not directed that he should receive such of his salary as was due him, but that, he was confident, was quite an oversight.

And now, on the advice of Mr. Stebbings, he was going to stand himself a lunch to celebrate the occasion. It was not to be an ordinary, unimaginative city lunch, Mr. Stebbings had insisted, but an elaborate meal in courses, with a bottle of wine, and a cigar and coffee and a liqueur to end up with.

Mr. Stebbings said that he would have invited him to just such a lunch himself, had he not unfortunately had an engagement already. He very helpfully, however, supplied Mr. Chedworth with the

address of a restaurant he could recommend.

Mr. Chedworth was now setting out for this restaurant, and that was why he looked both expectant and apprehensive. For this was the first time in all his life that he had ever contemplated lunching appropriately in that delectable region known as "Up West." He had snatched hurried, arid little meals in cheap teashops in Oxford Street and the Strand before now, when the exigencies of business and hunger had synchronized with his presence in the neighborhood. But this was to be a real, slap-up, elaborate affair, and, though he assured himself that he was going to enjoy it, he knew that the ordering and consuming of it presented ordeals which would perplex and embarrass his sensitive, shy little soul.

But he had made up his mind to go through with this lunch. He agreed with the senior partner that it was the one right, fitting way to signalize the beginning of his new life of affluent leisure. Here was luxury within his reach after years of carking, unremitting economy, and he must welcome it in the time honored way with the ritual of food and drink.

What was more, he was going to do the thing properly, with no stint, and with all the correct, high preliminaries and consequences. He intended to take a taxicab to the restaurant, to go on afterward to a theater, where amusement might charm his mind and assist his digestion. And afterward—home and Mrs. Chedworth and the children and the stress and strain of bickering domesticity as a corrective.

A man was selling violets at the corner of Flaming Sword Lane, and Mr. Chedworth, after a little hesitation, bought a bunch of them, because it seemed to him that the circumstances demanded a buttonhole as outward and visible expression of festive intents.

"Mustn't go home wearing 'em, though," he reminded himself.

He knew the devastating criticism that would greet his appearance at home with a bunch of violets in his lapel. His wife would want to know why he bought them, and where, and how much he paid for them, and then she would begin to talk

about economy and drag in mention of boots that needed repairing and crockery that needed renewing. And all the four children would be listening—Gladys in her quiet, lethargic way, and Cedric with a grin on his sallow face; and Kathleen would stop her piano practicing, and young Norman would probably ask a silly question or two about violets and buttonholes on purpose to egg his mother on.

No, it wouldn't do to take his buttonhole home with him. He would drop it somewhere on his way back. He hoped they would be picked up by some one who liked violets as much as he did, and who would be pleased to find them so fresh.

He stood at the edge of the pavement in an effort to secure the taxicab, which was to be the first of the day's luxuries. Empty cabs passed him this way and that, at frequent intervals, but none stopped at his timid beckoning. Most of the drivers made it clear that they did not want to notice his summons—two or three of them, slackening speed, glanced at his shabby, insignificant little figure and shook their heads contemptuously, and drove on. So at last he had perforce to swarm on a bus and travel westward between an irate stout lady and a snuffy old gentleman who kept grunting and wriggling aggressively. It was something of a come-down, but Mr. Chedworth felt the pressure of his plump wallet against his breast and he found it wonderfully stimulating.

And presently he dismounted from the bus and found his way to the desired restaurant. Twice he approached the portal and then shied and drifted past it. But the third time he approached the entrance he became involved in some way with a large, hilarious party descending from taxicabs. Yielding himself to the line of least resistance, he was swept with this happy crowd through the door and into the lounge of the restaurant.

"So far, so good," murmured Mr. Chedwick thankfully, and then perceived that a uniformed porter was scrutinizing him with a suspicious eye.

"Lunch!" said Mr. Chedworth firmly to the fellow, though inwardly he was in a tremor.

"Your hat, sir," remarked the porter, regarding Mr. Chedworth's obsolescent headgear with a fixed, inimical stare.

Mr. Chedworth convulsively removed his hat.

"Cloakroom on the right," stated the porter, as one engaged in repressing an affront to the establishment.

Mr. Chedworth went obediently to the counter of the cloakroom and surrendered his hat to another uniformed attendant, who gazed at it with a similar sardonic misfavor to that exhibited by his colleague.

"How much?" queried Mr. Chedworth.

"No charge."

"Tip you now, and get it over," offered Mr. Chedworth, with some idea of buying the man's respect and good will. "And your pal—does he—"

"We share—sir."

"Right you are!" said Mr. Chedworth, and banged down a half crown on the counter very affably and conspicuously. "That's between you!"

He'd show 'em he was a jolly sight better off than they were guessing by his hat! But the fellow did not seem greatly impressed. Indeed, his pained, disdainful mien suggested that Mr. Chedworth had been close-fisted and indelicate. Perhaps, thought Mr. Chedworth, it wasn't so much of a tip after all. Half a crown was a lot to him—used to be, anyway. But this was an expensive place. He wondered what he would have to tip the waiter. He ought to have remembered to ask Mr. Stebbings that. Bit awkward, when you were not used to tipping.

Mr. Chedworth found himself being shepherded into a vast, glittering, noisy apartment, where one waiter passed him to another along the narrow aisles that ran between the crowded tables. He followed his guides blushing and uncomfortably, with increasing realization that he was an incongruity in this confident, well groomed throng. More than once he sought to glide into some vacant chair, but he was inexorably conducted to a remote corner where the ultimate waiter, after one single appraising glance at him, accepted delivery of him with no more zeal or interest than he would have accepted delivery of a sack of straw.

Rather surlily he accommodated Mr. Chedworth with a seat at a table where he could see little and could be but little seen himself. Mr. Chedworth decided that he was the kind of customer they wished to keep out of sight as much as possible. Quite frankly, he didn't blame them. On the whole, he was glad they had taken this line with him. He'd enjoy his lunch all the more.

There were two other guests at the table, but they had finished their meal and were clearly meditating departure. One of them—a big, leather faced man with two fiery pimples on his cheek, and an air of dour, angry opposition; the other was a much younger man, plainly dressed in clothes which were no longer new but still preserved an appearance of quality and good taste. The face of this young man was handsome in a boyish way, but it was pallid and troubled, and he was sitting back with arms folded, staring dejectedly at the tablecloth.

Mr. Chedworth, beyond a furtive, apologetic smirk at them as he sat down, did not give heed to either man, for he was now confronted with the task of ordering his lunch and the prospect filled him with trepidation.

The matter, however, proved unexpectedly easy, for no sooner had Mr. Chedworth indistinctly mentioned "Er—lunch, please," than the waiter whipped out three or four suggestions as though they were commands, and then, without waiting for a reply, walked away.

He had returned with a disconcerting number of little dishes, and was ranging them before Mr. Chedworth, when abruptly the big man opposite pushed back his chair.

"Well, I'm off," he announced brusquely. "Busy. Thanks for the feed."

The younger man, rousing himself from his dejection, turned appealingly to his companion.

"Then—then you won't?" he asked.

The big man, pursing his lips tightly, shook his head.

"But—but—" pleaded the young man, and laid his hand on the other's sleeve.

"No good," said the big man. "It

can't be done, my boy. Sorry," he ended perfunctorily, and rose from his seat.

The younger man rose, too, but his companion had already begun to make his way toward the distant door. The young man, staring blankly, incredulously, watched him go, and then slowly resumed his chair.

"That finishes everything," he whispered, and sat forward with his elbows on the table and his palms pressed against his temples.

III.

MR. CHEDWORTH, by covert inspection of what other people were doing, contrived a creditable handling of his *hors d'œuvres*, though his instincts, trained by a lifetime of economy, rather rebelled at leaving so much in the little dishes to be taken away again by the waiter.

His soup presented no difficulties, and he tackled the fish course with a relieved zest, for, somewhat to his surprise, it was recognizably fried fish.

And then came doubt and perplexity again, for the waiter, setting a leather-bound pamphlet before him, asked none too hopefully:

"Wine, sir?"

"Er, yes," said Mr. Chedworth. "A bottle."

The waiter opened the list and flicked his finger nails across it.

"Which will you have, sir?"

"Er—" hesitated Mr. Chedworth. "What do most of 'em have?"

"A nice champagne, sir?" suggested the waiter.

"Er—yes—champagne," decided Mr. Chedworth.

Of course he ought to have remembered! Champagne was notoriously the correct thing for an occasion like this.

"Er—not too much!" he called after the waiter.

Thereafter his lunch proceeded with a delightful smoothness, for the waiter now developed an easy friendliness toward him and was proving himself most helpful. And Mr. Chedworth enjoyed his champagne, sipping cautiously at it, and finding a rare relish in the flavor and prickle of it.

And, as the meal progressed, a soothful

benignancy began to steal over him, and with it there came a strange sense of boldness and equality. He glanced about the crowded restaurant and reminded himself that, after all, he was probably a good bit richer than most of these dressed-up people here. Still, it was capital to be enjoying one's self as an equal among them. He hoped every one was finding as much pleasure in lunching as he was.

His gaze fell on the young man opposite. He was still sitting there in a dejected attitude, stirring his feet now and then as if about to leave, but coming back to inertness again, as though he could not bring himself to face the world outside.

Mr. Chedworth felt sorry for the young man. It was so clear that he was in trouble of some sort. Pity everybody could not be bright and cheerful on a day like this!

"Er—" began Mr. Chedworth, impulsively addressing the young man and nodding his head at the bottle of champagne. "Would you care—I mean—will you join me in a glass?"

The young man, despite his listless expression, was surprised by the offer.

"No—no, thanks," he said.

"Do you good," encouraged Mr. Chedworth, and, to his own surprise, began masterfully pouring champagne into the young man's glass. "First time I've been here," he mentioned as a sort of vague explanation.

The young man sipped at the wine, and, setting down his glass, moodily eyed Mr. Chedworth.

"It's the last time I shall be here," he said.

Mr. Chedworth did not like this. It seemed to him that there was an insult concealed in it somewhere. He resolved to leave the young man alone.

A few minutes later a fresh question of procedure presented itself to him. He beckoned to the waiter.

"I never thought—about my bill, I mean," he said.

"Yes, sir?" asked the waiter, becoming vigilant at once.

"I suppose they can change a bank note here for me?"

"How much for?"

"Five pounds."

"Oh, that 'll be easy enough. Thought you meant a big one, sir."

In some oblique way, Mr. Chedworth's vanity was wounded. A five-pound note had always seemed such a stupendous thing to him, and here was a man who classified five-pound notes as small. Mr. Chedworth felt that his own importance as a champagne customer was in jeopardy, and he resolved to impress the waiter.

"Better change a ten-pound note for me if it's as easy as all that," he said, drawing out his wallet and making play with the wad of notes. "Here you are," he went on, selecting a note with some care, and then examining it with an assumption of casualness. "No, that's a fifty-pound note," he pointed out with secret pride in this clever display of his wealth. "What about this? No, that's another fifty. And this lot is the fiver. Ah, here's the tenners. Change me one of them, will you?"

The waiter went off respectfully enough on his mission. Mr. Chedworth, looking across the table as he put away his wallet, found the young man's gaze fixed broodingly upon him.

"There's two hundred pounds in there," Mr. Chedworth could not help telling him, and nodded as though to say: "Now snub me if you can!"

A thought recurred to Mr. Chedworth. What about tipping the waiter? He was in a quandary. He did not want to be mean; on the other hand, he did not want to be a fool and overdo it. He resolved to risk another rebuff from the young man opposite.

"By the way, wonder if you'd mind telling me?" he said, leaning forward confidentially. "This waiter chap—what ought I to give him? I—I never been here before, you see. Never been to any place like this before," he admitted frankly. "Want to do the right thing."

The young man seemed to be waking up. He sat back and examined Mr. Chedworth shrewdly.

"Having a little holiday, eh?" he suggested.

"In a way. I—I've done with work."

"Retired?" questioned the young man, and seemed puzzled to reconcile Mr. Chedworth's faded coat and frayed necktie with this theory.

"That's about it. I—I got enough to keep me going for a bit, anyway," returned Mr. Chedworth.

He forgot that only he himself could appreciate the humor of this remark, and he winked genially at the young man to emphasize his drollery.

"Saved it up, or—or speculation?" asked the young man.

"Neither," declared Mr. Chedworth, with wine-warmed joviality. "Yesterday I was a bit of a confidential clerk, and to-day I'm—I'm a man of means."

"How did you manage it?" queried the other, with eager, swelling interest.

But Mr. Chedworth suddenly decided that he had confided quite sufficient amid strange surroundings to a young man who was quite unknown to him. Didn't do to tell everybody your private affairs!

He therefore shook his head reticently, and determined to change the subject of conversation.

"Nice, lively district, this, I dare say," he remarked. "Wouldn't mind living round here myself. That's to say, when I—when I hadn't got to be somewhere else. Do *you* live anywhere round these parts?"

"I? Yes, only a few streets away."

"No wonder you drop in here for your meals."

"Oh, to-day—well, I had to meet some one. Business, you know. Where do you live?"

"Oh, a long way out," answered Mr. Chedworth evasively. "But what I'd like to do is to find a room somewhere handy round here—not too showy, of course. There's particular reasons about that. What I shall be looking for is a nice, quiet place, where—where I can be private. Where—where certain folks would never think of looking for me. That's the sort of place I'm after."

The young man sat looking at him with a strange intendment. Mr. Chedworth—pleased to think how diplomatically he had stated his requirements—awaited a reply.

"Come along round to my place," in-

vited the young man suddenly. "We've got a spare room. It might be arranged—"

He rose urgently. His face was no longer pallid, but flushed, and his eyes were shining with repressed excitement. He lurked restlessly while Mr. Chedworth settled his bill and gave largess to the waiter. Three minutes later the young man and Mr. Chedworth quitted the restaurant.

"Sure it won't inconvenience you, me coming round this time of day?" asked Mr. Chedworth.

The young man laughed wildly, incomprehensibly.

Contrary to Mr. Chedworth's expectation, it was to quite a shabby little by-street in the neighborhood that the young man led him.

"Oh, it's all right—you're quite safe," he exclaimed, perceiving his companion's surprise. "Poor, but honest. We've got the top floor over this shop."

He pushed open a door and led Mr. Chedworth up flight after flight of dark stairways.

"In here," he directed, and took Mr. Chedworth into a front room which, though small, was furnished with admirable taste and richness.

The young man glanced quickly about the apartment.

"My wife must have gone out," he observed. "So much the better."

Mr. Chedworth noticed the tone of relief, and idly attributed it to a notion that Mrs. Young Man must evidently be rather of the formidable pattern of Mrs. Chedworth.

"Sit down," invited his host, indicating a comfortable armchair; and Mr. Chedworth sank luxuriously into its broad depths.

The young man went to a bureau and stood sidewise to Mr. Chedworth while he fumbled something from a drawer into his pocket. Then, seating himself opposite his guest, he regarded him inscrutably for a full half minute.

"About that room?" prompted Mr. Chedworth uneasily at last.

"That was only the bait," said the young man.

"Eh?" ejaculated Mr. Chedworth.

The young man, going over to the door, locked it and put the key in his pocket.

"Here," said Mr. Chedworth, half rising with a ludicrous expression of alarm on his mild little visage.

"Listen!" ordered the young man. "I want eighty pounds; and you've got to lend it to me—or give it to me. I don't care which. I've got to have it, and I'm going to have it!"

Mr. Chedworth gaped helplessly at him.

"I'm desperate," declared the young man. "I warn you!"

He drew a small, shining revolver from his pocket.

"Are you going to give it to me without any trouble, or—"

"Don't—don't be so ridiculous," gasped Mr. Chedworth. "Let me go! I ain't going to—"

"I'm going to have it—eighty pounds! I've got to have it. And you've got two hundred!"

"I won't! It's—it's robbery!"

Mr. Chedworth was terribly frightened, but money had always been so tremendously important a thing to him that the yielding up of a sum like eighty pounds was such an inconceivable demand that blank amazement overshadowed even his fears.

"Robbery?" said the young man. "Rather late in the day for you to quibble about robbery, isn't it?"

"Robbery, it is!" insisted Mr. Chedworth. "I'll go to the police! I shall—"

The young man laughed in loud, mirthless scorn.

"Oh, of course you'll go to the police," he sneered. "That's likely, isn't it? Don't bluff, man—don't bluff!"

"I—I ain't bluffing," denied Mr. Chedworth unsteadily. "I'll go straight to 'em and tell 'em how you—"

"Oh, no, you won't—you won't risk that! What about your own little affair—that two hundred pounds? Wasn't that a robbery, eh? Do you think I can't put two and two together?"

"What do you mean?" quavered Mr. Chedworth. "It's honestly mine. I—"

"Honestly? Why, man, you've given yourself away over and over again to me! A man like you with all that money on

you! And squandering it in an expensive restaurant. And you said yourself that you were only a clerk yesterday. What does all that point to? And, on top of that, trying to find somewhere where you can lie low! No, don't try to bluff it out. You've got that two hundred pounds from somewhere *somehow*! Theft or blackmail, or whatever it was, you've got it! And you're going to give—yes, *give* me eighty pounds of it!”

“I shan't! I won't! You're all wrong!”

“Eighty pounds,” demanded the young man. “I'm letting you off lightly. I'm not taking a penny more than I absolutely need. The biter's bitten, my friend.”

“You wouldn't dare kill me!”

“I could! I tell you I'm desperate!”

“You wouldn't dare!”

The young man perceptibly hesitated.

“Well, I don't know. But if you don't give up, by the Lord, I'll hand you over to the police!”

“Go on,” challenged Mr. Chedworth, thrilling with relief. “Do it! I shan't give you a penny. Hand me over to the police!”

“And what good will that do you? You'll get a year or two in jail. Far wiser to give me what I ask.”

“I won't,” stoutly returned Mr. Chedworth, marveling at his own courage.

“Give it to me, or I'll take it,” screamed the young man in a sudden access of passion. “Give it to me!”

He strode forward, pointing the revolver straight at Mr. Chedworth. The little man, after one dread glance at the other's new expression, capitulated.

“All right—I'll pay!” he panted. “Here's—here's the money.”

With trembling fingers he counted out the notes and thrust them at the young man.

“Just in time!” breathed the latter, snatching at his booty. “Another five seconds, and— Oh, I can't! I can't!” he cried wildly, and pushed back the notes into Mr. Chedworth's hands. “I can't do it! It's the first time—”

He flung himself into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, broke into weak sobbing.

“Here, give me the key!” quavered Mr.

Chedworth, as much shaken by his reprieve as by the peril of the last few moments. “Let me get out of this. Give me the key. I shan't—”

The young man dragged the key from his pocket and dropped it at Mr. Chedworth's feet. Mr. Chedworth eagerly bent to pick it up, and as he did so there came a hurried rapping at the door, and a woman's voice anxiously called out:

“Brian? Are you there, Brian? What's wrong, dear? Let me in—let me in at once!”

IV.

THE young man dashed the back of his hand across his eyes and looked up at Mr. Chedworth.

“It's—it's my wife,” he said. “Don't give me away. I don't want her ever to know. I must have been mad—mad!”

Mr. Chedworth fumblingly unlocked the door and opened it. On the threshold stood a young and very beautiful woman. She ran into the room and bent over the young man. Mr. Chedworth, stepping thankfully out onto the dark landing, pulled the door to behind him, and leaned, trembling, against the banisters.

“The police,” he whispered to himself. “Straight to the police! Trying to rob me—revolver and all! The police—they'll—”

He stopped. A disconcerting thought flashed athwart his resolve. There'd be a police court case, and it would be in the newspapers very likely. And then it would come out that he had two hundred pounds on him, and that he'd met the chap at lunch; and then Mrs. Chedworth would want to know all about it, and there'd be the end of his dream of idle, cheerful little holidays by himself. And Mrs. Chedworth would have a lot to say about hiding the news of the legacy from her.

No, it wouldn't do! After all, he'd lost nothing. He'd just keep quiet about the affair. And, in a way, he was feeling rather glad that this decision had been forced upon him. That young lady—she looked so alarmed and anxious. She'd done him no harm. And, dare say, the young fellow was in a pretty awkward fix.

“Been mighty desperate myself over

money, before now," thought Mr. Chedworth, with a faint glow of sympathy and understanding. "Never so desperate as that, though, of course. Not revolvers and that sort of thing. Always kept myself in hand. Hadn't got the pluck to do otherwise, maybe. And, in the end, it always come straight with me. Still, if you're pushed hard for money— No, I shan't say nothing to the police about it. Let 'em go!"

He made his way slowly down the stairs. On the first-floor landing, a stout, disheveled, good natured sort of woman came out of a door and examined him with amused interest.

"Been up to the top of the 'ouse, ain't you?" she asked.

He nodded. Her gaze traveled over his clothes from faded hat to patched boots, and she took him for something like what he appeared to be.

"Another of you, eh?" she remarked.

"What do you mean—another of us?"

"Bills? Bless you, your sort's going up and down them stairs all day! Didn't get paid, though, did you, I'll lay! None of 'em ever do."

"I—I ain't a bill."

"Summons, then, eh?" antagonistically surmised the woman. "That's worse. There's always one or other of you blood-suckers—"

"And I ain't a summons, neither," denied Mr. Chedworth indignantly.

"You don't mean to tell me you've come from the old man?" demanded the woman in some excitement.

"Old man? What old man?"

"Is father! Mr. Carford's father!"

"Oh, he's got a father, has he?"

"Yes, and a nice specimen he is, too! Quarreled with the boy. Won't have a thing more to do with 'im because 'e married against 'is father's wishes. And her such a nice young lady, too. It's a sin and shame, and if you're a friend of the old man's—"

"Nothing to do with me, none of 'em," disclaimed Mr. Chedworth, and went on down to the street.

He hastened away from the house quickly enough, but gradually his pace slackened

and at the corner of the road he halted, deep in meditation. And at last he swung round and briskly retraced his steps.

"May as well do a bit of good if I can," he told himself. "What's the use of money, otherwise? Besides, another time he might be more desperate. And it would be a pity if that young wife of his— Rum," he reflected. "I've often wished some one 'd come along to help *me*, and now here am I going to help some one else. I feel I've got to do it. I suppose that's because I've been through it myself."

He climbed the stairways again and rapped at the door of the young man's front room.

"Er—what about that room you've got to let?" inquired Mr. Chedworth as the door was opened.

Carford staggered back, gasping.

Mr. Chedworth caught a glimpse of the girl beyond, and he frowned in caution at the young man.

"The room? The empty room?" stammered Carford. "It's—it's this one." He led Mr. Chedworth into a vacant room adjoining.

Mr. Chedworth quietly shut the door and turned to the young man.

"Going to ask you a question," he said. "What did you want that eighty pounds for?"

"Because we'll be homeless to-morrow. I'm broke."

"What—broke and lunching at restaurants?"

"I was giving a man lunch. It was my last chance. I thought perhaps he'd lend me the money. But he was like all the rest of them."

"Married against your father's wish, didn't you?" asked Mr. Chedworth bluntly.

"Yes. What's that got to do with you?"

"Won't he help you?" persisted Mr. Chedworth.

"No. He's finished with me."

"What about your wife's people?"

"She's an orphan. Why do you—"

"Got an idea about lending you the money myself," said Mr. Chedworth.

"You? Oh, if you would! No—I forgot! I—I'd rather not. I know how you got it."

"Paying a pretty high price for your honesty, ain't you?"

"I don't care! I confessed about—about *that* to the wife; and I've promised—We'll get along somehow. I'll pay off everybody, in time, once I get the chance."

"Got a job?" dryly asked Mr. Chedworth.

"No," the young man had to admit.

"Spent all your money on the furniture, eh? Bill of sale on it, and it's being claimed to-morrow—ain't that about it? I thought so. You're in a nasty hole, my boy. And if your father don't give in—"

"He'll give in, sooner or later."

"Meanwhile," Mr. Chedworth reminded him, "you've got to live. How are you going to do it? *Now*, will you let me lend you the money out of—of what I've got in my pocket?"

"No! No, I tell you! It isn't fair of you to tempt me. I don't want to get mixed up in your—"

Mr. Chedworth held out some bank notes to Carford. The young man struck them to the floor and strode from the room.

"He'll do!" decided Mr. Chedworth. "He's straight enough."

He picked up his notes and followed the young man into the other apartment.

"That room will just about suit me," he said. "I'll get it furnished this week. It's just the sort of place I want. And—and I don't mind paying a sort of premium for it. Say—say a hundred pounds."

"I told you—" began the young man, only to be interrupted.

"I'm going to tell *you* something first. About me and my—my circumstances. It's a secret, mind. But it's true, and I can prove it to you. And—and I dare say I can fix up some sort of a job for you, just to carry you along for a bit. Sort of part-time secretary, eh? I'm looking for some one like that, what I can trust. Now, you listen to what I'm going to tell you about myself, and promise you'll keep it dark."

V.

"A BUTTONHOLE!" shrilled Mrs. Chedworth when her husband warily entered his home that evening.

"I—I forgot!" guiltily exclaimed Mr. Chedworth. "Had—had rather an exciting day, my dear."

"Exciting? What happened?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing special. Just been fixing up about the commercial traveling. I start out on the road next Monday."

"And a good thing, too," she declared. "But why you should go wearing vi'lets, at *your* age—"

"Bought 'em for you, my dear."

"I dare say!" she returned cynically. "It was just a bit of extravagance, and you're trying to get out of it! You know you can't afford to go squandering your money like that!"

THE END

The third story in this series, "An Adjustment of Accounts," will appear shortly.

U U U

THE COMPLEX

WHEN I step on that thirteenth tee,
I just become—well, frantic;
That dinky little pond, to me,
Looms broad as the Atlantic.
The Psychos tell me that it's just
A complex, or such bunk,
But when I drive and holler, "Fore!"
My complex answers, "Sunk!"

Robert Baker.



Clovelly

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Night Horseman," "Dan Barry's Daughter," etc.

CHAPTER XXXI.

UNDYING MALICE.

WHILE he mastered himself, and as the blood began to circulate more quickly and his limbs grew supple, he fought for time strictly on the defense. But before three exchanges, Lascelle seemed to realize the strategy of his antagonist, and he flung himself heart and soul into the combat.

It was a masterful attack. The blade alone, deft as it was in the hand of Clovelly, could never have saved him from those assaults, but in his own peculiar fashion he danced back, swerving his body from side to side before the assault.

Once the darting point leaped so close that it touched his temple near the eye; again it slipped through his shirt and rubbed its cold length against his naked side.

For five minutes, death was constantly before him, but at the end of that time the numbness had left his legs, his wrist was again flexible, and he had regained that perfect balance upon his feet which is of all things most necessary to the fencer who fights for his life.

He had been driven to the edge of a plot of roses before that time of self-mastery came to him. One backward step would entangle him hopelessly in the soft mold, and to gain that advantage Lascelle pressed his attack with a relentless fury.

The smiling confidence with which he had begun the battle had left him. His expression was a settled and malignant sneer. In every thrust he fought to kill with the hunger of one accustomed to slaughter. Sweat glistened upon his forehead from his work, but his eyes were brighter than ever.

The crisis had come. In the distance,

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Clovelly saw the four men crouched in the intensity of their interest, following the attack and the defense with little movements of their hands, as though they recognized the working of two masters here and were intent not to miss one portion of the lesson.

There was the crone, too, laughing in the moonshine and the lamplight, and rubbing her withered hands in a savage ecstasy.

There, last of all, was Cecily, with her hands clasped, and her face raised. She was praying—and for his victory!

"God in heaven!" cried Clovelly to his heart of hearts. "If she is not true, there's no truth on earth."

He put by thrust and lunge. He gave Jack an inch in spite of himself, and felt his right heel sink a little in the treacherous, soft garden earth.

"More art, *monsieur*! More art and less strength!" he said to Lascelle. "I have played with you long enough. In a moment I begin to give you a lesson."

"You dog!" snarled Lascelle. "Here is the final stroke!"

And he lunged to the full of his long arm and agile body. But venom had made him hold that stroke an instant too long, and beating it aside with a strong parry, Clovelly side-stepped into the open, and danced away from the garden edge into the center of the turf where the footing was firm beneath him.

There was a general shout to attest this important achievement, and again the voice of the hidden watcher:

"Bravo, Clovelly! Lascelle, you are matched!"

Lascelle repaid that exclamation with a snarl, and closed again. A feint, a lunge, a thrust in rapid succession. Then he rushed in past the point of Clovelly until their bodies struck together.

There was no room to use swords then. There was no time to shorten the weapons, either, and Lascelle, twisting his leg about that of Clovelly, cast him off balance and threw him heavily.

It would have been the death of any ordinary man, but Clovelly was no inert and stunned figure. He landed on the turf as a cat might have landed, and twisted lightly to his feet again.

Even so he would have died, but Lascelle, thrusting murderously when his man fell, had missed his twisting target and passed half the length of his rapier into the turf. Before he could disengage his point, Clovelly was on his feet.

"Foul!" cried the voice of the hidden watcher. "A foul stroke, Lascelle, by Heaven!"

"The fortunes of war!" answered Lascelle, panting with his work. "Luck has saved you, Clovelly, for the last time."

"Hear me, Lascelle," said Clovelly, anger making him cold, according to his peculiar nature. "This is not Clovelly. It is the ghost of Darnac come to take revenge upon you. I remember now. It was such a trick as this that killed Darnac. But it has failed now. You are a dead man, Lascelle."

"You lie!" groaned Lascelle.

But he gave back a little, as if to recover breath, and looked furiously around him at the black faces of the four men who watched, and who had instinctively run closer at this display of unfair tactics.

"Aye," said Clovelly instantly, "look around you, Lascelle. Your last look at the moon. Your last scent of the night wind. You have not a minute before you. Darnac—Darnac—is waiting!"

And he leaped in to the attack.

Lascelle gave back, returned with a counter assault, maintained even war for half a heart-breaking minute, and then retreated again.

There was a tumult in the court. The hidden watcher was shouting his enthusiasm. The four men, quite won over from Lascelle by his recent exhibition of foul play, now cheered the victorious progress of Clovelly. But the latter fought even more with his tongue than with his sword.

"Stand fast, Lascelle," he panted. "Brave Frenchman, do not run away, I beg you!"

Lascelle grinned in the savagery of his hatred, but he dared not waste breath upon an answer. Still the dancing point of the Englishman's rapier was before his eyes, and still he retired.

"Beware the soft ground!" cried Clovelly suddenly.

Lascelle, in spite of himself, uttered an

exclamation of fear and leaped to the side—straight into the point of Clovelly's weapon! A swerve at the last instant saved him from a death stroke, but the leaping steel pierced his left forearm between the elbow and the wrist and brought out a quick flow of blood.

A fresh shout came from the watchers. And now a richly dressed man ran into view. It was that hidden watcher with the vaguely familiar voice. It was the Duke of Ipswich.

"His grace," said Clovelly, "has come to see you die. Now, Lascelle," he added ironically, "for the glory of France. And remembering that narrow, dark street in Orleans where you murdered Darnac—"

"Devil!" groaned Lascelle, and drove in for the finish.

He came half blindly. The narrow sword of Clovelly danced, then the flicker of the steel went out, and the point was deep in the Frenchman's body.

He fell without a groan. The rapier, still clutched in his hand, was drawn across his breast.

"Clovelly," he gasped. "I am a dead man."

"I hope not," said Clovelly. "I hope not, Lascelle. A villain I have no doubt you have proved yourself this night; but I pray that death will not rob the world of so fine a fencer! Come here—in the name of God, some one with a skill in wounds, come to look to poor Lascelle—"

The four came running. Ipswich himself was hurrying forward when Lascelle muttered:

"It is too late, my friend. I feel the darkness in my brain. I felt the sting of death when your point entered me. Well, I have given it to enough! I have given it to enough! Lean closer to me, *monsieur*. I have done a foul thing to-night in this battle. I shall repay you with a confession."

"Of one thing only, Lascelle. Confess to me that when you destroyed Darnac in Orleans it was not through fair battle—"

"Lean closer—lean closer! I am weak, Clovelly. I have no strength to speak loudly."

Clovelly, holding back the others as they

ran up with a gesture, leaned above the dying man.

"*Monsieur*," said Lascelle, "all who say that they saw me kill Darnac lie. The street was empty. What happened was this: I had fallen by tripping on a damned loosened stone. As Darnac stood above me, I cried out for mercy. He accepted my surrender like a gallant and generous man, and as he leaned to lift me from the ground, I stabbed him thus!"

He had been moving his sword as he spoke, until the point was addressed to his target. Now he thrust suddenly at Clovelly's breast. The latter was no better than a dead man, for no movement of his own could have saved him from the sudden and treacherous thrust, but one of Lascelle's own companions, who had been watching his face intently, jerked Clovelly sharply to the side, so that the point of the fallen man's sword pricked through his shirt only.

"A thousand curses!" groaned Lascelle. "You, De Graumont, I shall return from the grave to haunt you!"

De Graumont shrugged his shoulders.

"I saw the devil come into his eyes," he said quietly, "and I knew by that that there was trouble coming. God be thanked that I acted in time or this murderer would have taken another victim with him to hell."

"Lascelle," said Ipswich, speaking with a voice full of horror and yet with something of compassion as well, "you are fast dying. There is only one thing that can be done for you. Whatever gifts you have to friends or family—whatever messages you wish to send, give them to me. They shall be delivered, I promise."

"Friends?" echoed the dying man thickly. "Family?"

He broke into a stifled laugh which choked away to nothingness. His arms and legs twisted convulsively together. Then he lay still, looking up to the broad white face of the moon with dull eyes. He was dead!

"A plague has been removed from the world," said his grace of Ipswich, kneeling by the motionless body. "I call you all to witness that I have never yet read, or seen, or heard of such malice. Yet, now

that he is gone, God rest him and give him peace in English ground."

So saying, he closed the eyes of the fencer. He raised the sword from the limp hand which could no longer hold it.

"And, my friends," continued the duke, "since he was a blackguard, but yet a matchless man with a sword, and since fencing is of all arts the most noble, it is fitting that no hand after his should manage this weapon. It was given to him, I believe, by a prince of the blood royal of Spain. Let it be buried with him."

With this he snapped the rapier across his knee, dropped the broken fragments upon the ground, and turned away.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE FOG BEGINS TO LIFT.

WHAT Clovelly saw when he wiped his sword blade and put it up in the sheath again was not the dead man on the ground, or the broken rapier; neither did he hear the words of the duke, except as a meaningless echo, for his whole mind was bent upon Cecily, his wife.

She no longer prayed, but leaning weakly against one of the pillars which made a portico on the west side of the little court; her head was fallen, and the steep shadow lay across her face. Clovelly took heed of this with a peculiar agony of spirit.

"Is it despair because her tormentor has conquered? Or is it utter thanksgiving because I have not fallen?"

These were the questions he asked himself, sadly. But in the meantime, his grace of Ipswich had taken possession of him and was dragging him into the house, pouring forth a jovial confession of his villainy covered slightly by a pretense of a mere sporting spirit:

"I was tired of hearing the Frenchman praised as the paragon of all earthly swordsmen. I made a bet with Ormonde that I could furnish an Englishman who would whip Lascelle to death in a fair fight, hand to hand, foot to foot, sword to sword.

"Ormonde was so confident that he offered me odds of three to one. But I disdained the taking of them, for I knew that

you would be my champion, Clovelly! And I knew that an English hand and an English heart would match any in all the world."

In the meantime they had come close to Cecily, and the hand of the duke turned to iron on Clovelly's arm.

"By all that's holy," whispered his grace, "I had forgotten her! Present me."

And Clovelly, as he murmured the name of the great noble, and saw Ipswich sweep his finest bow to the girl, told himself that he had come to the end of the bitterest part that ever a man had been called upon to play. But there was still more before him; even crueller minutes to outface. The duke ushered them both into the house, and as they walked on, he found an opportunity to whisper in Clovelly's ear:

"Is she stout oak and willing to give truths a name?" he asked. "Or is she mincing with her words? Does she take greater care of herself in her talk than in her actions?"

"Your grace," muttered Clovelly guardedly, "she is a puzzle which I have not been able to solve. I have ridden with her on the road all these days, but I know less about her at this moment than when I first caught sight of her."

"That makes me think you a philosopher, Clovelly. It is usually in the twentieth year of a man's married life that he begins to find his wife extraordinary. But, you, Clovelly, are an exceptionally rare and lucky fellow. You have probed the nature of your wife to the bottom in half a fortnight—"

"My lord," said Clovelly, through his teeth, "no more talk about man and wife, if you please."

"What, man? Did you not really marry her?"

"Only with words—an empty ceremony."

"By Heavens, Clovelly, did you hire a false priest for the purpose? Have you gone to such a length as that?"

"No," Clovelly replied heavily. "We were married by a man of God—and I wedded her with a ring."

His jovial grace of Ipswich stared at his companion, and stared far harder with

wonder when he heard the pirate muttering to himself: "What have I done? What have I done?"

"Hark, Clovelly!" whispered the duke. "Tell me, by all that's wonderful, have you a conscience in this matter?"

"What?" asked Clovelly, starting as though out of a dream.

"This little trickster or a pretty-faced girl—"

"You are right! You are a thousand times right. I thank your grace for recalling me to myself. No, no! I have no conscience in the matter, only knowing that in this way, and in this way alone, I shall be able to sail the Main again and do the work I have sworn to do there."

"Spoken like the true Clovelly of whom all London, I swear, talks half of every day."

"The ship is prepared for me, then?"

"She is ready—ballasted with a good cargo, manned by a selected gang of murderers, thieves, cheats, coiners, deserters, adventurers. They would storm the Tower of London for a shilling a man. You'll love them, Clovelly! And they have the clear presentment of their characters written in large in their faces."

"Good!" said Clovelly, but his voice somehow was weak.

So they came into a little room which, it was apparent, was part of the duke's peculiar quarters. It was no more than an alcove with some shelves of books, a fire burning to the side, a Persian carpet of tangled reds and blues and golds upon the floor; some monstrous dragons and other works in china, according to the newly introduced fashion, and, above all, a hanging lamp which was supported by a slender chain of gold and cast up, as it burned, a slender stream of vapor, which curled across the ceiling and then dropped into delicate rifts through the room which it filled with the most exquisite fragrance.

The central table, which was of ebony richly inlaid with ivory, was covered with a litter of papers at which his grace had just been working. He knocked them into a heap, sat lightly upon the edge of the table, swinging a foot, and waved Cecily and Michael Clovelly to chairs. Neither

of them, however, moved, Clovelly because he was deep in thought, and the girl because she was beginning to turn cold with fear.

"We have now come to the time for our agreement," said Ipswich in his pleasantest manner. "I presume you know, *madame*, that your husband is presently called away to duties in a very distant land, and that I am to serve as your protector during his absence?"

There was a frightened cry from Cecily, which brought a frown of surprise to the face of the duke and made Clovelly start.

"Michael," she demanded, "what does it mean?"

"I have promised," he answered, finding it hard to meet her great eyes, "to bring you to a heaven upon earth. And here it is. What will you have, Cecily? Great wealth, power, half the kingdom at your beck? It is common knowledge that his grace is the key to the king's heart, and you will have the turning of it."

"*You have sold me!*"

His grace stepped to the farther side of the chamber and waited, ill at ease at this unexpected turn of events, rubbing his chin with his finger tips and looking hastily from one face to the other. But Clovelly saw that his eye was kindling. And, indeed, Cecily had never seemed so lovely as she was now, with fear making her pale and despair giving her courage.

"Sold you?" echoed Clovelly, gloomily. "I have only done my best to advance you. What higher position could you ask?"

"To be your *wife*, Michael—your true wife to love you—to honor and obey you. Michael, Michael, you have sworn to protect me!"

And now light broke upon the mind of Michael Clovelly. He looked wildly about him upon the luxury of that room where a whole fortune had been lavished to make the comfort of a single corner of a house. He stared again at his grace of Ipswich.

The evidence of his eyes and of his ears had been against this woman, to damn her as one who loved pleasure only; but here was evidence almost equally strong that she preferred poverty with him to all that wealth could do for her.

"Your grace," he said, "we must talk further upon this matter."

"Let *madame* retire to the next room," said Ipswich, biting his lip.

He went to the door and opened it upon an adjoining chamber.

"No, no!" cried Cecily. "If I leave you, what may happen to me, God alone knows. Why should you talk to him?"

"There is no other way," said Michael, shaking his head.

Then he went to her and took her hand. And, as he stood close to her, she felt his whole body trembling with excitement.

"Can you trust me, Cecily?" he said.

She lifted her head at that, and looked him steadily, quietly, in the face. There is a strength and a courage needed to meet the weight of a man's eye, but strength and courage were in her. And this sad, unshrinking patience gave her beauty such a poignant grace that Clovelly's heart ached.

He could only say: "Wait in the next room beyond this door. You will not be long alone."

"Is it good-by, Michael?" she asked him quietly, and before he could answer she was gone through the door.

He closed the door upon her and turned to Ipswich, who was regarding him steadily beneath a scowl of anger.

"Mr. Clovelly," he said grimly, "I fear that the country has had an ill effect upon you. Or is it considered good manners even in the country to whisper before one's host?"

Clovelly flushed, but there was such a wealth of happiness crowding into his heart at that moment that he could not be angry.

"Your grace," he explained, "we must come to a new agreement."

"Ah!"

"I agreed to bring the lady to you."

"Exactly."

"And I have done so."

"In a manner—yes."

"And now, my lord, I shall take her away from you!"

"By the dear Heavens, Clovelly, you are mad to say so."

"Your grace," said Clovelly, "will hold me to my contract?"

"Strictly, Clovelly. I have seen her, man! I reached for gold, and I have found diamonds. Let her go again? I am not quite witless, my friend."

"My lord," Clovelly remarked, "I have in my time been a sufficient rascal. I have been a pirate, a swashbuckler, an outlawed highwayman, and do you think that I shall now hesitate to steal away the woman I love?"

"I have fulfilled my contract, I tell you. I have brought her to your house. As for the ship which is your price, let it sail or sink for all of me. I want none of it.

"Only Cecily I desire, and her I shall have, by force, if need be. But surely your grace will not attempt to keep a woman who has shown that she has no liking for you!"

"For the moment, perhaps not," the duke admitted. "Her head, I see, has been turned by her galloping, ranting, fighting cavalier who has dragged her from her father's house and half across the kingdom. But that will pass. I know ways to soften stubborn hearts, Clovelly."

"No, no—for the matter of her present reluctance—it is a mere nothing."

It is not to be considered. And as for taking her away with you again — tush, man, she has been bought and sold. I do not care to put a new price on her. As for taking her away by force—I tell you Clovelly, that I have a dozen men here, any two of whom could stop you."

These statements Clovelly seemed to consider for a time, leaning against the wall and looking down at the floor. But presently he stepped without a word to the door, turned the key in the lock, and dropped it in his pocket.

"You are quite right, sir," he said.

"There is only one way in which I can safely take her away, and that is through your command."

"How will you buy that from me? Tell me, Clovelly? I warn you that I have taken a deeper fancy to her than to any trifle that has met my eyes these many years. For she has more than beauty, Clovelly. She has brains! The clever minx can play the part of virtue as well as any good woman I ever saw, and—"

"My lord, you are speaking of my wife!"

"Ten thousand devils, Clovelly! Are you mad?"

"You speak of prices and purchases. I can pay a great price, sir."

"Of pirate gold, Clovelly?" sneered the duke.

"Of pirate gold, my lord. Do you see?"

And, slipping his rapier from its sheath, he made it swerve so dexterously through the air that the yellow lamplight flashed solid upon it.

"Ah!" cried Ipswich. "Is that the tune? You will murder me to take the girl safely away with you?"

"If it is necessary," said Clovelly calmly, "I shall stab you to the heart, my lord, and take my wife away with me."

His grace turned crimson with anger. His rapier hissed and hummed in the air; he brought it forth with so much violence. Then he saluted Clovelly deliberately.

"You are already half-spent with fighting Lascelle," he observed. "Do you deliberately challenge me in spite of that?"

"In the name of God," said Clovelly, "begin!"

"She is worth the price!" cried his grace, as if the picture of her beauty had at that instant flashed more brightly across his memory. "Clovelly, you are right. Gold cannot buy a woman. The metal is too base. The steel alone is worthy of her. On guard!"

He gasped out the last word as he lunged with fury. His sword was flicked away with a touch of the other blade so soft that it was like the pressure of a bare hand. And the duke suddenly was aware that it was one thing to see Clovelly fence—it was quite another to feel his opposition.

A thousand light, quick hands seemed to surround Clovelly and pushed danger gently away from him. For a moment he stood on the defense. Then he began to attack.

His grace was a brave man, a thousand times proved. Moreover, he was an exquisite fencer who fought like an artist of infinite invention. To the very last he would be dangerous.

But against the rush of Clovelly's attack, against that onslaught of a dozen schools of fence, he was carried back as a log before a tide. Through the door of the study

and into the larger chamber beyond he retreated, where the clicking of steel on steel sounded smaller and colder and raised many little echoes from the walls.

Still he kept a good front while his breath held, but when his wind was gone he was helpless. The point of Clovelly's rapier flickered before his eyes.

"Your grace," gasped Clovelly, "let us make an end. You see that the advantage is in my hand, but God forbid that I should use it—"

"Damn your courtesy," said the nobleman hotly. "I am as ready to die now as a year hence!"

And with this, he rushed blindly in upon Clovelly. The latter might have killed him three times during that blind advance, but instead, he chose to glide out of the way, dancing back until Ipswich should come to his senses.

Then fate took a hand against the conqueror. Clovelly's foot lodged on a small rug which slipped from beneath him as if the floor had been greased. He landed heavily upon his side, his wrist striking so solidly that the nerves were numbed, the rapier clattered from his fingers, and he lay prostrate and helpless before his enemy.

It appeared for an instant that Ipswich would pass his weapon through the body of his opponent. He leaned above him with his face swollen and reddened by exertion, his sword quivering in his hand.

"Surrender, Clovelly!" he commanded.

"The devil has played on your side," answered Clovelly. "Do with me what you will. I shall not surrender."

"You are in my hands."

"Stab and be damned!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AN UNENDURABLE DOUBT.

HIS grace was often cruel, but never wantonly so. Now he shook his head.

"If you were any other man in England," he said at last, "I'd send the blade through you, Clovelly. But I've an idea that you are a man of honor, my friend. Rise!"

Clovelly stood up, white-lipped from the shame of his defeat, almost the first that had ever come to him sword in hand.

"Tush, man, tush!" said Ipswich. "You act as though some fat old man had beaten you, or some boy newly come into his swordship and his oaths. But I tell you, man, that no man living can say that he has seen Ipswich worsted with the small sword.

"Matters went a bit against me at first; my wind is short and I'm damnably out of practice. But aside from that, and the bit of bad luck which brought you a fall, I think I should have paid you home before the end."

Thus spoke the duke, raising his spirits as he argued more with himself than with the other. He had been a desperate and half-beaten man a moment before, shamed and helpless before the swordsmanship of Clovelly.

But now, as he talked of the battle, he smoothed out the doubt from his brain. He was laying the basis for a magnificent lie, concerning that battle, which would be bruited through the fashionable circles of London the next day. And as he thought how much that tale would do to establish him as an Achilles as well as a Paris, he could not help looking upon his associate with a greater warmth of good feeling. At least, Clovelly made no reply and his silence might be interpreted as an agreement.

"However," continued his grace, "I have no desire to use my sword to make my fortune—or to save it, even! We have fought for the lady fairly and honorably.

"Chance and the sword gives her to me. I might make no other payment. But instead, I shall carry out to the letter my first agreement with you.

"The ship is prepared. You may take command of it when you will. And that should prudently be as soon as possible, for the king's men are looking for you, Clovelly. Old Hampton has put another five hundred pounds on top of his standing reward to any one who will bring about your capture—or your death!"

"There is only one thing in the world which is of any concern to me," said Clovelly.

"The Spanish Main! Of course! To a man of your metal, there must be action. England is a dull place. By gad, I feel it myself every day. Only dull habit makes a fool of me and keeps me here."

"Not the Spanish Main. There is only my wife, my lord."

Ipswich made a wry face.

"You love her, Clovelly?"

The husband shrugged his shoulders.

"But how under heaven you can," said the duke, "is a miracle to me. You are a man of pride. And you have seen with your own eyes and heard with your own ears enough to—"

Clovelly groaned.

And at this, his grace drew back a little and looked at Clovelly with new eyes.

"This is the way of it, then," he nodded, speaking more to himself than to Clovelly. "The tale of Samson and Delilah over again."

Clovelly was silent.

"Take up your sword!" said Ipswich suddenly.

Clovelly's eyes gleamed. Then, with a sigh, he murmured: "Will you run that risk again, my lord?"

His grace smiled faintly.

"I have nothing to fear from that damned subtle blade of yours," he declared. "You are an honest man, Clovelly. You are a thousand times more honest than you yourself guess, and I have nothing to fear from you. That sword will be locked into the sheath until I give it permission to be drawn."

Clovelly stooped without a word and replaced the weapon in its scabbard.

"Now, my friend, I can offer you a fair gambler's chance."

"My lord?"

"The Spanish Main, to which a vow leads you, has shrunk to a small pond, I take it."

"There is more treasure in one word from her than in a thousand galleons, your grace."

"Poetically expressed. Very much to the point. But concerning another matter: If you should attempt to live with her as man with wife, consider that you are also marrying your doubt of her."

"God knows it!"

"You will put only one meaning upon the smiles of men you pass in the street."

"I shall endure it."

"You think so now. But I tell you, Clovelly, you are wedding yourself to an infinite torment whose fire shall not cease to burn if you live five score years."

"It is true," groaned Clovelly.

"In spite of all this, you will have her?"

"If God will help me to her."

"Now, Clovelly, your doubt of her was based chiefly upon a story told by one man."

"Talk of Marberry—and the evidence of my own eyes!"

"Eyes and ears will lie. I say, pull your cloak about your face and go to Marberry. Wring the full truth from him. If it is as black as I think you will find it, then I am trusting that you will never wish to lay eyes on the lady again. But if you make that rascal confess that he has lied, then your doubt vanishes like a pricked bubble!"

Clovelly raised his head with a start.

"And while I am gone—the lady—"

"Remains here with me."

"My lord?"

"I have said it! She remains here with me. While you work in your own way, I work in mine. When you return, even if you wish to have her, I trust that I shall have persuaded her that there is happiness with Ipswich."

Clovelly turned pale.

"Only persuasion will be used, on my honor! And I'll wager you a hundred pounds, Clovelly—"

"My lord, on this subject I do not bet."

"Your answer, then?"

"There is only one choice for me. I must take it, and leave her here—God defend the right!"

"You have grown into a pious pirate, Clovelly. But now, start on to your work. Adieu!"

"Adieu, my lord."

"You have ways of making the fellow speak even against his will?"

A smile of infinitely cruel malignity appeared upon the grim face of Michael Clovelly. Then, gathering his cloak about him, he retreated to the door, bowed, and dis-

appeared. His grace stepped to a bellcord and pulled it, whereat the soft-footed Randal instantly appeared. At sight of the crumpled, displaced rugs, an overturned chair, and the disorder of his master's person, his eyes grew big.

"Say nothing; guess nothing, Randal," commanded the master. "To-day I have mastered the finest blade in the world, fighting upon equal terms. Bring me a glass of sherry. Then lay out that newest suit of plum-colored velvet. Quickly! Quickly! I have a great campaign to make!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

GOSSIP.

THERE was need for the porter who worked in the service of Edward Marberry to be a man of discretion and of perception. He gave the young gentleman who wished to see his master so unfortunately one glance and was about to close the door and shut the fellow into the outer dark when something caught his eyes—of sufficient importance to make him open again, hastily, and stare at the man outside. He now seemed to make sure, for suddenly he began to smile more with his eyes than his lips and stepped back, waving to the stranger to enter.

The later slipped with a light step within the door, a slender figure, rain-beaten, with a cloak of black which time had rusted, a hat with a bedraggled feather, and boots enriched with red mud half way to the knees.

"I'm sure," said the porter, "that Mr. Marberry will see you—sir."

And with an odd accent upon the last word, he left his guest and disappeared into his master's room. He came again with his smile now broad enough to be plainly visible. And he ushered the nameless stranger into a high-ceilinged room at one end of which was a table covered with various bottles and several glasses. Beside the table, resting in a great reclining chair, heaped with pillows, was the invalid who had been recruiting himself and killing the time with recourse to the wine-bottle.

It was Edward Marberry himself, not

yet recovered from a wound which he had received at sword play with Clovelly not many days before. Suffering of the flesh had been less than the suffering of the spirit of this man, who could not bear to be shut away from all of his old delights of fluttering around the court, of haunting the fashionable coffee-houses, of hearing a rare word from a wit here, and a profound judgment there; of sipping like a bee at a thousand flowers, a thousand bits of gossip spiced with malice, and blending all that pollen into a honey of delicious lies to be given freely away to those who were his friends.

How could Ned Marberry endure a life cooped within half a dozen rooms? No matter that his friends came often about him. The aroma of the tales they told him was staled already by time. For what is the joy of sitting still like an old woman over her knitting and listening to the chattered scandal which two granddaughters rattle for each other and for her ears?

Far sweeter, far sweeter, surely, to overhear a conversation whispered in a corner of Will's coffee-house with so keen an ear that all the double meanings are deciphered and unspoken things are added to the spoken. How exquisite a delight to probe through the conversation of two fops and under the flowing of their banter to discover the very names of the ladies of whom they talk!

In such arts was Marberry a master. He was, indeed, a known genius in his line and those who wished not for the rank and open talk of the court but for those hidden undercurrents and for those overtones of mischief, hunted him out and made much of him, if perchance he would open his budget of news.

For although it was known that he would rather invent lies than be discovered without what he reported to be a "new tale," yet his lies were so cunningly planned and always based at the foundation upon such bedrock of truth, that they never failed to come near enough to the truth to make some beauty in Whitehall turn pale or some gentleman at a fashionable tavern wince while the steel glided through his spirit.

But having been confined to his room, or damned to it, as he phrased his imprisonment, every hour and every day infinitely increased his misery and he was now in a poisonous frame of mind so that a smile of nervous malice was constantly upon his thin lips and wrinkling his haggard cheeks, and his tongue carried a mortal sting in every sentence.

He watched the shadow of the closing door before he looked up from his chair toward his visitor. Although the face of the stranger was thoroughly masked by a high furling cloak collar, yet Marberry saw enough to make him shrug his shoulders and laugh.

"You've ridden through the mud, then," he said. "Lord, Betty, you've come on a far journey like a little fool. Don't stand there like an idiot with your face still masked. Come, come!

"Any man with an eye in his head could tell by the mincing manner in which you stand with your feet so close together, that there is a woman beneath that cloak, and a damned silly one, I believe! But show your face, minx! I'm tired of talking to a wall."

At this, the collar of the cloak was lowered.

"By all the dear heavens!" breathed the voluptuary, half rising himself from his chair until the sudden burning of his wound made him release his hold upon the arms of the chair and sink back again.

Then: "Clovelly!" shouted Marberry.

"A little louder," sneered Clovelly. "London will be glad to hear that I am come."

"Have you dared to show your face in the city?" cried Marberry. "When the whole town is placarded with descriptions of you and rewards offered?"

"I have brought some few along with me," said Clovelly.

He plucked some crumpled handbills out of his pocket and cast them upon the table.

"The price of my head goes up," he observed casually. "What with the contributions of the worthy squire and my lord Penistone, I considered that there was enough offered to make me a fat prize even to a prince of the blood royal, but now in comes

the solid Puritan, Oliver Perth, and claps a round two hundred pounds upon my head in addition. 'Slife, Mr. Marberry, this is a forwarding of the king's justice with a vengeance, eh?"

Marberry gazed upon him, fascinated.

"But what brings you to me?" he asked. "Why are you come to me, rather than to any other in London?"

"Partly," said Clovelly, "to confer a favor, and partly to receive one."

"And the nature of these favors?"

"Why, Marberry, I confer a favor upon you by giving you a subject for gossip. Am I wrong? Half of London will flock to your chambers when they learn that the celebrated man-killer and robber, Michael Clovelly, actually presumed to call upon you and tell you anecdotes of the open road."

"But what anecdotes will you tell, Clovelly?"

"I should not presume to put words into the mouth of a master. I abandon such a small matter entirely to the invention of Mr. Marberry."

"You are kind," Marberry declared, smiling in spite of himself.

"But," said Clovelly, "do not have me kill too many men. I detest bloodshed, on my honor. Six or ten you may reasonably put in, but there call a halt. You may tell them, also, that Clovelly drank your health in your own wine."

Here he poured a glass of sherry from the bottle which was standing on the table, tasted it cautiously, rolled it in his mouth until he had formed an opinion of its excellence, and then drank off the rest of the glass as slowly and as luxuriously as a cat finishing a plate of cream.

"Will it serve?" asked Marberry.

"It is good. It is at least good enough. I have tasted some sherry lately that was like a mixture of plum juice and fire combined. You are a lucky fellow, Marberry, to have such wine under your roof."

"I am very sensible of that. But since we seem to have finished with the favor which you are doing me, what is the favor which I may do for you?"

"A simple one, but one of the greatest importance. You must know that every

true highwayman, Marberry, warms his heart in his constant isolation and loneliness by reflecting that most of the world is constantly talking about him. All lonely men are vain you know.

"And what you may do for me, is simply to repeat the details of my visit to you with a few embroideries from your fancy—just such as you think will furnish a good tale. Thus we are both benefited."

"Clovelly, this is all beside the point. You have come to London—"

"To hear the talk about myself. I have been loitering through the streets of London all day tasting the gossip and picking up odds and ends of information about myself, and above all enjoying the safety."

"If you were seen?"

"I shall not be, simply because people see only what they expect to see, and because they are blind to the unexpected. I could walk through London for a month before the hue and the cry would be raised against me. When I had heard what I could in the nooks and the corners, I decided to come to you so that my call might serve to give you a basis for invention."

"It is true!" murmured Marberry. "His grace of Ipswich will forget that he and I have fallen out and will come to hear the odd tale from my own lips."

"I have no doubt but that you will make a very good thing of this visit."

"It is a treasure, Clovelly. I forgive you the thrust that chained me here. I am your friend."

"You are very kind, sir."

"But now to come a little closer to the cold facts of your call—you are out of money, Clovelly. You have come here seeking a little cash?"

"Nonsense. When there are so many fat wallets in London one does one's begging with the edge of a knife; it cuts the strings of purses painlessly."

At this though, he burst into a soft chuckling. But all this while his glance never wavered from the eyes of his host, and though he laughed, his expression grew not a whit more pleasant. This was unobscured by Marberry, yet he forced himself to laugh in company with his strange guest.

"You are rare, Clovelly."

"And yet, Marberry, I confess that there is another reason for my coming to you—keep your hand from that bell-cord, my friend! Good! While I stand here chatting, you are thinking what an excellent figure I would make upon the scaffold beside Jack Ketch. Are you not?"

"In the name of heaven, do you think me such a brute as this?"

But he could not constrain his blush.

"Enough, Marberry. We know each other."

"Then—be damned to you for a knave. What will you have?"

"The truth about a very small matter—a matter as small as a woman, in fact; and her name is *Madame Clovelly*."

CHAPTER XXXV.

DARKNESS FLEES.

MARBERRY waved his hand as one who will take up a conversation only by compulsion, so to speak.

"Women, at best, are poor things for talk, Clovelly," said he.

Clovelly sat down lightly on the broad arm of a chair and swung one foot in the air as he continued: "You are a known man, Marberry. Not a man or a woman in London but knows what a clever devil you are with the ladies. They cannot resist you, man."

The other smiled in spite of himself.

"No talk of that," he remarked carelessly.

"But it must be talked of when all London is willing to listen and to believe. But, Marberry, I was with Milverton, as I think you know, on a certain night when we saw you leave a certain garden, which shall be nameless."

"I remember," growled Marberry. "And the next morning Milverton would walk with me. I peppered him properly and then in come you with your damned sword magic and run me through!"

"By the eternal heavens, Clovelly, it is neither right nor fair for such fellows as yourself to take the field against simple, honest gentlemen. What chance have we

against you? No more chance than a man off the streets has to match the tricks of a master juggler."

He shuddered as he remembered.

"If I had known about you then what I know now," he said, "I'd have seen you damned before I'd have engaged you. I'd have set a gang of bullies to maul you in the streets by night to keep off the meeting!"

He shivered again. "Pour me another glass of that sherry, Clovelly. I'm cold through and through when I even think of it. You might have killed me on the spot—with no more effort upon your part. Gad, there was a life—a special malice in that sword of yours. I swear to heaven that it worked against me of its own account and of its own accord."

"You say much too much, sir. But concerning the lady—for, you see, I did *not* kill you."

"What about the lady? What about the lady?" asked Marberry sharply. "What the devil have you to learn from me about the lady? You're married to her, aren't you?"

"After a fashion of speaking, I am."

"After a fashion? After a fashion? What mean you by that?"

"You are testy, Mr. Marberry, but the question I wish to ask may be very shortly put."

"Put it then, put it then, and be damned. I'm tired of this talk, Clovelly."

"In one word, then, was Milverton right?"

"About what? No, damn him, he's never right."

"Ah!"

"One would think that I had given you a present of a great estate to judge by your face. What is it you want to know of me?"

"You have already answered me when you said that Milverton was wrong in thinking that Cecily Medhurst had been your mistress."

"Did I say that, then? Well!"

"Is it not true, man?"

"You are very pale Clovelly."

"Is it true, Marberry?"

"'Fore God, one would think that you loved the girl."

"No matter for all that. You destroy my very soul by refusing to speak. Say yes or no!"

"To what?"

"Marberry, if you push me too far, remember that I am a man of violence, and I have been in places where sick men had scant grace."

"Come, lad, I only teased you. It's about Cecily, is it? But you cannot come to me expecting to pull out all the secrets of my inward life like a soul-doctor to whom I'm confessing my sins."

"I have not expected it for nothing. Look here, my friend. Look here!"

He drew his hand from his pocket and clapped upon the table beside Marberry a long, almond-shaped emerald. The other took it up with a cry and looked to it with a keen and knowing eye.

"Very good, upon my word!" he declared. "This will do, indeed, Clovelly. This is a very precious jewel or else I am a blind owl. No, by the Lord, if this green heaven came near me, the blindness would leave my eyes to let me see it. And this is an exquisite and a perfect jewel, my friend. What the devil do you mean with it?"

"It's the price, my friend. It's the price I'm paying you for one bit of that truth drawn from your inner life. Tell me: Were you the messenger of Oliver Perth, only, or were you in truth in that garden on a mission of your own?"

The face of the roué wrinkled to a smile.

"Very good!" he murmured. "Very good, indeed! Of course, I was there simply as the messenger of the Roundhead."

"Marberry, you smile."

"I cannot help but smile—when I think that I was only the messenger of Perth."

Clovelly staggered, and dropped his hand upon the back of a chair to support himself.

"It is true, then," he whispered. "And she is as black as I have guessed!"

Marberry shrugged his shoulders and cherished the emerald between his hands.

"For such a price—one must tell the truth even about a charming lady, my friend. Even though the truth is a fire that burns you."

Then, brighter than the shining of the jewel, the blue-white of the naked sword blade shone in Clovelly's hand.

"What a good work it would be," he snarled through his set teeth, "to loose that jackal soul of yours and send it hunting in another world than this! What an act of charity it would be!"

Marberry shrank from him and twisted both his hands into a knot before his face to keep from his view the quivering, bright death.

"Do you mean to murder me, Clovelly, for telling the truth?"

"No. But for most damnably lying! You have two seconds in which you may commend yourself to God—if you have a God! Marberry, you are about to die."

"No!" screamed the wounded man, cowering in the chair, his lips grinning in the agony of his fear. "In the name of mercy, Clovelly."

"Speak the truth, then!"

"I shall—I shall—"

He choked and gibbered in his frantic effort to speak, while the terror nearly froze his lips.

"Now!" commanded Clovelly.

"I came from Perth to her!" gasped Marberry.

"Is that the truth?"

"The whole truth."

"You lied when you hinted that she served you as a mistress?"

"I lied, Clovelly."

"To make the world think you invincible with women?"

"Yes—yes—before God, you shame me. But that was the reason."

"And you sacrificed the pure name of a blameless girl for that same reason?"

"I confess it."

"Tell me this—have you ever dreamed or guessed at evil in her?"

"No!" gasped Marberry, twisting in his chair as the foulness of his sin was drawn out from him in its full horror. "I swear to you, Clovelly, that so far as I have known her, she has always been more of a saint than a woman."

There broke from Clovelly's lips a wild shout of joy. He cast up his hands, his face suffused with color.

"Then instinct was right," he cried. "It has told me the truth whenever I have been near her. It has roared out to me above the evidence of my eyes and my ears. She had met you secretly for the sake of Perth. With the courage and the pure heart of a blameless girl, she dared to interview you in the middle of the night and dismiss you herself from the gate of the garden."

"She did."

"Marberry—you consummate devil! Oh, Cecily, my beautiful—"

And he turned and rushed from the room.

When he was gone, Marberry reached for the bell—but a second thought made him draw back his hand again. Whatever he had lost in that interview, he had gained a jewel of which a king might have been proud.

He leaned back in his chair again. The congested look of fear and shame left his face. The emerald lay like a pool of the purest beauty in the palm of his hand. It was more to this voluptuary than any woman.

But in the meantime, Clovelly had reached the street with a brain on fire. For the dread which haunted him now was that at the very moment when he discovered the perfect purity of Cecily, she would be lost to him.

It was strange enough, he thought, that she could have preferred him to Ipswich even for an instant. But it would be a miracle indeed if she still preferred him to the duke when the latter had had a chance to show himself in his most winning fashion to her and display before her all the resources of his fortune, all the talents of his person.

It was White Harry that he rode through the streets of London, but even the speed of this powerful animal was slower than a snail's pace dragging him wearily out the Oxford road. White Harry was staggering with exhaustion when his master at last flung himself from the saddle.

Into the court ran Clovelly; and there the solid blackness struck him in the face. No light was burning. All was sordid darkness.

It so sickened him that he felt his strength give way at the knees. He stag-

gered to the nearest door. The handle turned at once and admitted him to a pitch-dark hall. He called out he knew not what, and the long echoes rolled away. The house was empty.

And then, feeling what it meant—that Cecily had indeed made her choice and that Ipswich had taken her with him to another dwelling—all his agony broke from him in a terrible cry: "Cecily!"

He dropped upon his knees; he covered his face with his hands; no tears came from his eyes, but his body shivered and was wrenched with agony. For this, he told himself mutely, was the judgment of God come upon him. Here was the end of his strength. Here was a defeat which all his skill with the sword could not redeem, but he was wrecked as utterly as a fine ship struck suddenly upon a reef.

Then it seemed to Clovelly that he heard that voice of infinite sweetness calling to him out of the distance of his memory, "Michael!" as she had called on that other night when he had lost her in the wood, and she had guided him back to her with her own voice. At that memory, he felt he should go mad.

And ah! what a consummate fool he had been to doubt her after that final proof of faith. What a fool to make the slightest question of her, after once looking into the crystal purity of her eyes!

But, small and far, yet vibrant with grief and fear, he heard that cry again: "Michael!"

"It is not possible!" groaned Clovelly. "God, having seen me and judged me, would not let me find her again. This is all an illusion to drive me mad."

A door opened, and into the thick blackness of that hall came her very voice like a blinding light to Clovelly:

"Michael!"

He tried to answer, but his throat was aching and stiff with the marvel of this thing. Then he stretched out his arms, although he could not rise from his knees.

He managed to utter a sound, he knew not what word, but it brought a wailing cry of joy down through the darkness toward him, until suddenly she was within his arms, she was kneeling before him, she was

weeping, and the catch and the panting of her breath stirred against his cheek.

"I have heard everything from that dog, Marberry," he told her. "I know it all—I know everything of your sweetness and goodness—of my blindness—"

"And I, Michael, know only this—which is that I love you, I love you, my dearest—"

Afterward, they could speak of lesser things; they could descend out of the sweetness of their lovers' heaven to the dull and foolish earth and light a taper to aid their eyes. And then she gave him a letter which Ipswich had left with her for her husband when he came. He tore it open and read within:

CLOVELLY:

I have made your peace with the king.
You are no longer an outlawed man. There

is only one punishment for having doubted the blessed angel who has been foolish enough to love any man—that is to find her in a dark house alone. In the meantime, know that that house is yours and everything in it. You will see that if I sometimes pay much for the services of a crafty man and an evil woman, I shall pay much more for the friendship of a strong man and a good woman. God bless you both with happiness. She is a dear child. I blush for my folly that I should have dared to doubt her.

The scoundrel Marberry must be left to me.
G. I.

When they had read that letter, they blew out the taper and sat silently in the darkness again, watching the moon rise over the woodland and then pass into the fragrant gloom of the chamber where they sat, creeping across the floor until their feet were bathed in silver, and the tendrils of the vine which swung at the window were little branches of purest silver also.

THE END



HARBINGER OF AGE

MY years are not many. To tell the truth—
Well, fifty and some odd, then.
But what is that in these days when youth
Lasts on until threescore ten?

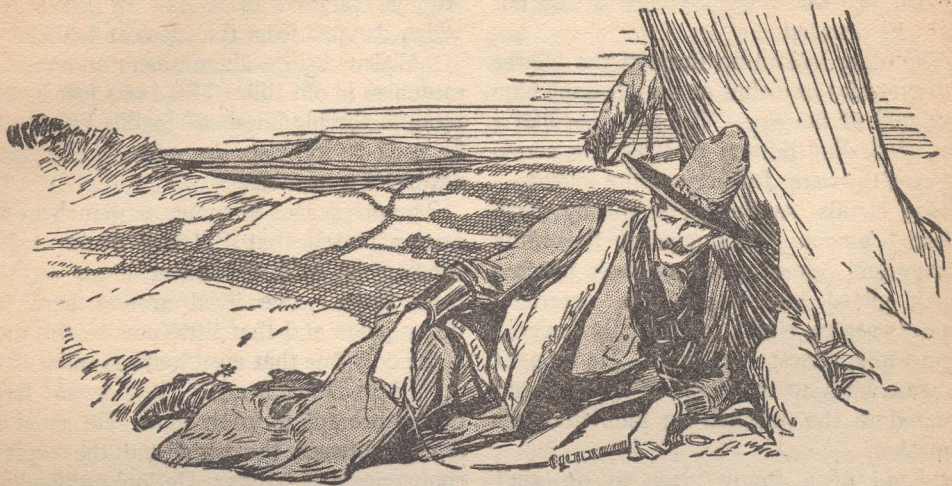
I know that my hair is the least bit gray,
And possibly thin on top.
But, goodness me, I can golf all day
Or waltz till the players drop.

I don't eat gruel and I need no cane,
And I haven't grown sour nor staid.
My hearing's good and my teeth pertain,
And I still have an eye for a maid.

To-day at the Smythes—Betty Brown was there—
Nineteen, and an imp for fun;
And some one bet that she didn't dare
To kiss me. Well, Betty won.

She kissed me light as a whisp of spray—
Not giggling, nor shy, nor bold—
But quite in an every-day, thoughtless way,
And I know that I'm getting old.

Louis B. Capron.



An Engagement in Trinidad

By **CHANDLER P. BARTON**

FROM the lone tree which adorned the highway from Encina to Trinidad hung four dead men, pendant like flying foxes or monstrous cocoons to the gnarled dry branches. Grass, as sparse as a Tartar's beard, vainly tried to cover the ground, and made a charred forest for big lazy ants; horned toads basked in the shade of skeletal shrubs, and a little way off a pinto pony impatiently pawed the sand. Beneath the tree, his hands propped behind him, lay a man. Over his buckskin chaps and glossy tall heeled boots, sprawled the grotesque shadows of the bandits.

The man was brown and had gun-metal colored eyes which gazed out across the desert. It was gray, and rumpled as a great fallen tent, and cactus and yucca trees stuck through it like the hands and arms of giants caught in the wreckage. Along the base of the distant hills a freight train crawled, and then entered a tunnel, like a

string of red ants. To the left, through a yellow haze, as of pollen dust, were faintly visible the squat misshapen buildings of a town, from which a road projected toward the oasis. Along this road advanced a khaki colored dust cloud.

After a while through the blur a horse was visible, and the dim outlines of a wagon. Later the wagon was seen to be a buck-board, on the seat of which slumped a lone driver.

When he drew up beside the tree the dust wake floated ahead and enveloped him, then slowly precipitated onto the road. The man on the ground shoved his gun back into its holster, then sat up and clasped his knees. There was no need for caution here: buck-board, horse, and driver were on a last feeble race to the scrap heap.

With his sleeve the stranger smeared a streak of mud across his brow, and raised his eyes to the hanged men.

"Do you know what you're sitting under?" he drawled.

The other looked up through the filigree of leaves and branches at the pleasant blue and gold of the sky. The sun was like a pan of sizzling butter; and floating across the zenith were feathery white clouds—swishy clouds, as though swept by some celestial broom. Then against the white background appeared three black patches which glided back and forth, described great swooping circles, and finally hovered for a while, almost motionless. He brought his gaze back to the limbs of the tree and grunted to the question an indifferent affirmation.

"Kind of a funny place to sit, ain't it?"

"I used to know some of these guys," replied the man under the tree. "I'm sort of interested."

There was a brief silence as the stranger turned and spat at a cactus leaf on the far side of the buckboard. He missed and the road spat back a puff of gray dust. "Darn good job though."

The other looked up blankly.

"I say it's a darn good job—hanging those fellows."

"Yes, I guess they were a pretty bad lot. Some of them were good scouts though. Take that one hanging on the end there. He could fight with anything from a beer bottle to a rapier, and he was a prince to talk or drink with. Sierra Sam always had something of the old time cavalier about him. Look at those mustachios, for instance, and that crimson sash around his waist. Even his rope necklace he wears with a distinguished air."

The buckboard driver dropped the reins. His horse nearly fell. "You seem to be quite an admirer of his."

"I am. On the other hand that fellow next to him was a surly cuss. You couldn't trust him long enough to blink your eyes." He looked up to where hung Zapato, the half-breed renegade, with his eyes and tongue disgustingly protruding. "He was brave, all right, but you could never be sure his delight in disemboweling gringos wouldn't be directed against yourself."

"Who was that next to him?" The

stranger pointed to a pair of great feet which dangled from the topmost branch.

"Walrus Bill? There wasn't an ounce of meanness in old Bill. There was just barely room in the big hogshead for his heart, and he used to kill deputies with all the good nature of a mastiff."

The driver looked again, as though to reassure himself that Bill was dead. "It's funny," he said, "I never knew any of those guys. I've lived around here for thirty years and that little one on this side is the only one that even looks familiar."

"Little Dude Davie? You *would* have been more apt to know him. He acted as a link between the band and the express companies and banks. He looks ridiculous there, don't he, beside the walrus? Davie used to be a forger and pickpocket, but he got tired of being respectable, so he came out West."

The stranger crossed his legs and leaned back, one arm holding apart his head and the seat. "You didn't happen to know the chief, too, did you? I'd be willing to trade the whole lot for him. He's the cleverest crook we've had out here since the early days."

The man under the tree flicked an ant from the tall heel of his boot. "I don't know," he said dubiously. "I figure it's more luck than anything else, with a little ordinary head work thrown in maybe."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, the night they were caught, for instance. The chief'd be hanging up there now only he happened to be in town with a toothache."

"Where'd you get that?"

"We go to the same dentist."

Another gray puff from the road, and the driver grew reflective.

"Yes," he conceded, "that was luck all right. But take that express robbery he pulled last month. That train was a regular traveling arsenal, and yet they wasn't a shot fired."

"Just an example of the head work I was telling you about. The chief figured the job'd go off a lot smoother if the guards had ammunition without any powder in it, so one of his gang who was working with the company fixed it up for him."

The stranger leaned forward, his elbows resting on his knees. "I still claim though, he's clever. Yet, they's always one weak spot in the best of them: He's going to get caught seeing that girl of his in Trinidad."

"I'm not so sure about that either. She's got a pretty good head of her own."

The driver pulled a plug from his pocket, brushed the dust from its gnawed edges and then took a prodigious chew. When it had found a comfortable bed in his mouth, "You know more about this fellow's business," he said, "than anybody I seen. Where'd you get all your information?"

"I work up at Red McDonald's place at Las Palmas. The gang used to come in there, and I guess the chief took a liking to me. When he'd had a few drinks he got confidential."

A gleam of intelligence lighted the wizened face of the owner of the buckboard. He scratched his head and examined the other perplexedly. "That's most interestin'," he said, "but I can't quite get it clear why I never met you before. Red McDonald's is one of my favorite saloons."

"I just helped out once in a while in the evenings. Probably I was off when you happened to be there."

Now the driver absorbedly studied his new acquaintance who looked back, questioning. "Excuse me," said the stranger, "for staring at you this way, but you look surprisin'ly like a brother of mine who went out to the Coast."

"They say there's a double for everybody in the world," the other answered. Indifferently he strained sand through his fingers, and a reply formed on the driver's lips.

Then, of a sudden a road runner skimmed and whirred past, within a foot of the rickety buckboard. The stranger grabbed the reins of his frightened horse, and from under his denim jacket there was a flash of nickel plate. The man looked up with a start as the deputy confusedly buttoned his coat. For a minute they stared at each other, wondering how much the other knew. Then:

"Weren't you goin' to say something when that road runner disturbed you?" asked the chief.

"Yes, I was wondering why you didn't grab some of those fellows hanging up there. Didn't you know they was worth a thousand bucks apiece?"

The chief looked toward his horse which was now stripping the leaves from its second shrub. "I don't believe in double-crossing," he said.

"Hm-m," said the deputy. "That seems to me like pretty close figurin'. I think I'd rather be in Jim Smith's shoes. I understand he used to belong to Terry's gang, but now he's got four grand cold, just for pointin' out the old mine where they hung out."

The eyes of the chief narrowed. His reply embraced the whole family of Slippery Smith.

"I take it you don't care much for Jim Smith?"

A buzzard, with its dusty, ragged wings and ugly red head, alighted a short distance off and gaped evilly at the tree. "He beat me on a horse trade once," said the chief. "From what *I've* seen of Slippery Smith the only thing *he* ever did straight was shootin'."

"You got to admit though he's fond of horses. He'd be crazy about your pinto there."

"Yes," said Terry, "I suppose hyenas have their good points, too." He rose and walked sidewise toward his horse. The deputy gathered his reins.

"You might meet Jim if you're goin' toward the cross roads. I just saw him at the blacksmith's when I left Las Palmas."

"I'll try not to let it spoil my evening." Terry mounted and walked his horse alongside the buckboard.

"Well, so long. Hope I see you some time at Red's."

"Thanks," answered Terry, "but I been located at Trinidad lately. If you're ever over that way look me up."

The deputy awakened his drooping horse, and after watching him until he was out of range Terry galloped off in the opposite direction.

II.

As he approached the cross road from Las Palmas Terry cursed himself, the tenth

time, for a fool. A point of pride with the chief was an ability to sense the presence of all minions of the law by instinct. And to have given himself away to such an innocuous appearing old wreck was particularly disagreeable. By nature, however, a fair man, who always offered a victim his life in exchange for his purse, he was disposed to believe in the fairness of heaven, so silently offered thanks for the road runner and flash of nickel. He further consoled himself with the thought that he might be able to pay off an old debt. The chief was scrupulous in these matters.

It *was* unfortunate though to be discovered at this particular time. He looked toward Trinidad, with its ill-proportioned, old freight car colored houses. Then he considered the endless row of telegraph poles which lined the road, and the filaments which connected them, sparkling in the bright sunshine. Terry had an engagement that night in Trinidad, and not only, as he said, did the girl have brains: she was constructed like a mail car, and had a mouth more enticing than the lock on an express box. Reaching the four corners he waited patiently for his creditor to appear.

Soon, trotting toward the four corners from Las Palmas he saw a bay horse with a rider, who, as he approached, had something unpleasantly familiar about the carriage of his body. When he came closer Terry noticed that the gait of the horse slackened, and observed a broad black felt hat tilted forward over its owner's face. One who did not know the man might have thought that this was to shade his eyes; but Terry knew that it was because the eyes of Slippery Smith had a shiftiness that would not bear looking at.

Finally his horse was drawn to a walk, and two other eyes stared at one another from the hip of each man. A hair's pressure on either gun would have discharged it, and the men estimated each other like two bull terriers until at last the chief looked up, half smiling.

"I figure," he said, "there isn't much sense to us both dying at the same time—what do you say we put up the artillery?"

The eyes of Smith narrowed as he peered past the horizon of his hat brim. "I was

just thinkin' the same way," he answered, "but I had a feeling our relations wasn't very friendly these days."

The pressure on the triggers lightened. "You mean for squealing on the gang? I believe in being sensible about that. The way I look at it that was a good job for both of us: you get the reward, I get five times the loot."

"It's sure a pleasure to talk to a man who sees things so clear," answered Smith. The guns were retired to their holsters. "Of course I knew you'd get away or I never would have done it."

"I want to thank you for that," said the chief.

"Don't mention it at all. I just naturally have a profound respect for men of ability. On the other hand I figure fools are fair game."

"Sure," answered the chief. "And if ever there was a bunch of bums those guys were it. It took more than half my time keeping them out of trouble."

At this Slippery Smith relaxed. "It's rather astonishin'," he said, "how many ideas we got in common. Did you ever think of goin' into some legitimate business?"

"I never had much experience along that line," said Terry. "Law sort of cramps me."

"You'd soon get onto it. All you got to do is keep your eyes open. People are just dyin' to trade gold pieces for plugged nickels."

"I don't know. I'm getting kind of old to learn a new trade. I ain't as versatile as you are." The chief again regarded the wires and long line of poles as the pinto strained at his bit, his legs and body tense as though made of sprung steel.

"It looks to me like you got pretty good taste in horse flesh. That's a good business. Another thing I noticed about people is they seem to favor bad horses to good ones. You can make a good livin' just by pleasin' them."

Terry touched a spur to the pinto's flank. It wheeled and then edged, quivering, alongside the bay. "I suppose that's true," he said, "but all the fine points miss me. If a horse has got endurance and a

fair amount of spirit that's all I know enough to ask for."

Jim Smith's shifty eyes examined the pinto from muzzle to fetlocks, then reached over and stroked its nose. "Maybe then we could arrange a little private business? I got a weakness for pintos."

"I got no objections," said the chief. "Color don't carry much weight with me."

Smith rolled a cigarette and lighting it inhaled a deep puff. "I tell you what I'll do." His words and the smoke came out together. "Business has been pretty prosperous with me lately. I'll give you the bay for him and fifty bucks to boot."

"That sounds like fifty to the good to me," said Terry. "I know you wouldn't ride anything that wasn't at least passable."

The men swung to the ground and loosed the cinches on the belly bands. Having changed saddles they remounted and the chief extended his hand. Slippery Smith took it limply. "Don't happen to be ridin' toward Trinidad do you?"

"No, I'm headin' for Santa Ynez to-night. I might see you there to-morrow though, if you're goin' to be around."

"Sure, I generally play a little pool after lunch. It pays the board, and I sort of enjoy it for a relaxation."

"All right, I'll look you up." They crossed the road together and then Smith turned the pinto toward Trinidad. "Oh, and say," called Terry. "I'm expectin' an important telegram in Trinidad this evenin'. In case you don't see me to-morrow you might forward it to me."

"Glad to. And if I was you I'd seriously consider going into business. It's more profitable in the long run, and you get away from all the nervous strain. In your line you never know what's liable to happen."

"It's worth thinkin' about all right," said the chief.

III.

At the top of a low hill a short distance along the road to Santa Ynez Terry stopped and watched Slippery Smith as he galloped toward Trinidad. Behind him the setting sun streaked the horizon with vermilion and

red and cast a green veil over the blue of the sky. The mountains slowly pulled dark purple quilts over the rose blankets which still covered their heads; the windows of the town turned to great topazes and its crude outlines softened.

The bandit though was more interested in the little grove of trees which adorned the outskirts of Trinidad. He thought he detected a stirring of life there. It might have been some stray cattle seeking shelter for the night, but as Slippery Smith approached Terry had a feeling that this was not the cause. Cattle are not so careful to conceal themselves, nor does their presence make leaves tremble or boughs bend down.

He watched the long easy strides of the pinto as it entered the shadow of the grove. He admired the seat of Jim Smith in the saddle and regretted for a moment that so able a man should have such an inadequate sense of honor. Then he saw a dozen gray puffs, like moths against the green background: the pinto leaped to one side and then dashed frightenedly into the grove. As the sharp rifle reports reached the Santa Ynez road Slippery Smith threw up his arms and fell in a crumpled heap.

IV.

THAT evening, while the buckboard driver was on his way to Trinidad, and the local deputies were making explanations to the coroner, Terry circled the town and entered by the road from Elco. Before the gate of a small white house he whistled, and a moment later a girl ran out and threw her arms around the chief.

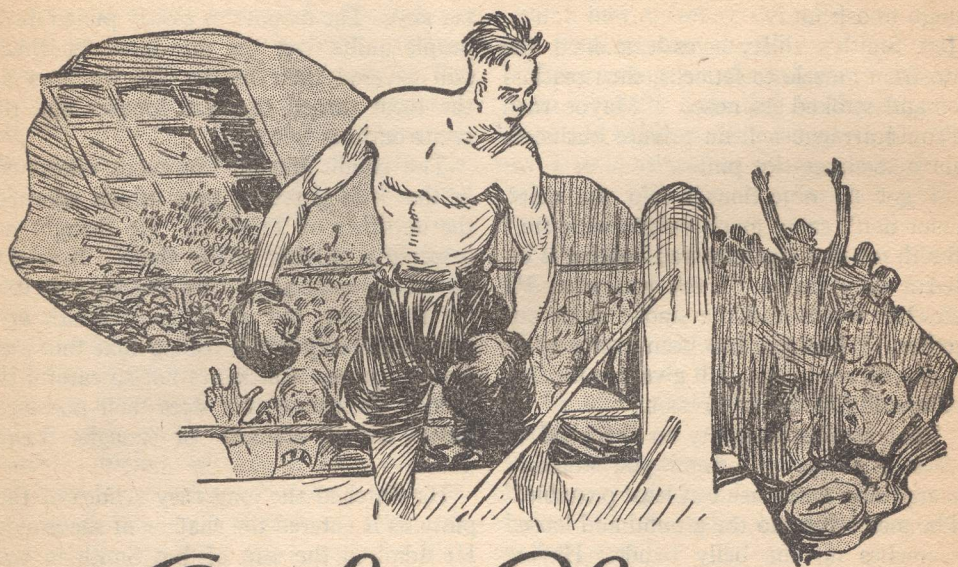
As they walked along the dark street she clung to him like a starved puppy. He put his arm around her and looked down smiling. "Been worried?"

Coaxing eyes greeted his smile. "Will you promise me something, Terry?"

"Maybe. What is it?"

"Give up train robbing—for me?"

"Well, maybe—for you," said the chief. "I like to know where I stand: you never can tell what's going to happen in business."



Only Cheese

By **RODERICK WILLIAM SILER**

“**C**HEESE!”

As Conley came out of the deep sleep into which he had fallen after stopping O'Hern's fist with his chin, this syllable, sibilant, and rather soft and soothing at first, came to his ears.

Considering the matter afterward, he distinctly remembered that the sound was, to begin with, distant, soothing, impersonal. He had been reclining against the ropes in his corner of the ring when his eyes had opened, and then his ears. His eyes assured him that about the spacious hall of the Pastime Athletic Club were moving a great many bodies; not the constellations of stars which he had seen at the instant he interrupted the flight of that missile which had felt so surprisingly like a horseshoe imbedded in a boxing glove, but rather bodies which moved with deliberation and grace, and between whom and him there seemed to be not the slightest ill will. These bodies, he realized (considering the matter later),

constituted the crowd trying to get out of the Pastime's lone entrance in time to catch last cars home. It was from the crowd that had come the syllable so sibilant and inoffensive at first.

Then out of that mass of bodies, so courtly and courteous as he remembered them at the beginning, there had popped a face; and from between the lips of that face, distorted by wrath or mirth, he could not tell which, there had issued:

“You cheese!”

There was no mistaking. Hazy as Conley was and as inclined to float indefinitely in the ether, he realized that the stranger had likened him to a cheese, and not because of admiration. There then appeared other similar faces; one, two, three, a score or more; all distorted offensively and all referring to the same dairy product.

Nothing other than this experience could so quickly have brought him to his senses, not even the bucket of cold water with

which his lone attendant, Manager Martin Burke, industriously swabbed him down. His natural truculence, absent only when he was asleep or partially comatose as at present, began to assert itself. His lower jaw, recently moved up and back by O'Hern, once more assumed preëminence in his face. "A fine bunch," he thought. "Because O'Hern, the lucky stiff, happened to smear me, they're off me! A fine bunch!"

No such crowd of quitters, emitting a certain monosyllable though some of them were, could permanently squelch Pat Conley. He looked them in the eye, and even began to frame his lips on a few polysyllables of his own. Steadily was he improving, as Martin Burke, trying to get him perpendicular, could vouch for; until among that departing throng he saw the face of Liola McDermott.

Sweet-faced Liola, his girl, was being borne off in a group of his intimates among the Pastime youths and ladies. Evidently they despaired of his arising before morning. Liola kept her soft, dark eyes on him. And then—he could have sworn to it!—Liola's mouth shaped itself to say:

"You big cheese!"

At that Pat Conley relapsed. His head again dropped forward on his chest. So that Manager Martin cried somewhat impatiently into his ear:

"Come on, Pat! Get off your back, will you? They'll be turnin' the lights out on us, yet!"

Ignoring this plea, Conley heard Burke call for help to little Tom Thorpe, a former admirer not yet out the door.

"Give us a hand here with Pat, Tom," said the manager. "O'Hern sure nicked him this time. He's wabby yet, and his legs no good at all. Us two will have to slide him along to the showers."

As Burke and the still faithful Tom hooked Conley under the arms and dragged him, on his heels, off the scene of his misfortune, he, himself, was more active mentally than physically. He pondered. He considered the obnoxious mention of cheese. Why, at the moment of his ill luck, was cheese referred to? What resemblance was there between him in his downfall and a cheese?

A possible answer to that suddenly struck him cold.

Did they think the resemblance one of color? Could they believe that he was touched with sickly saffron, hateful orange—with yellow!

II.

In the home of Patrick Conley, some evenings after the collision, the recent event was considered in great detail. Here Conley, Sr., father of Pat, conferred with Manager Martin Burke.

"'Tis a strange thing to me, Martin," ventured Mr. Conley thoughtfully over his pipe, "that Pat has always sich bad luck wid this O'Hern. 'Tis the third time they have met wid the gloves on. Every time Pat has done very well until the last roun'; and thin it is, each time, that O'Hern does manage to paste him for a home run."

"It's psychology, Mr. Conley," asserted Martin.

Mr. Conley shook his head.

"It may be so," he said at last, "but I'm thinkin' Pat has none of that."

"It's psychology," insisted Burke. "You know, Mr. Conley, I'm a salesman durin' the day, when I'm not helpin' Pat become amacher champ. Well, it takes psychology to sell goods. And it takes psychology to win fights."

"How does it work?" inquired Mr. Conley.

Martin cleared his throat.

"It's like this," he explained: "O'Hern and Pat and I went to grammar school together. Now O'Hern's drivin' a milk wagon, Pat's learnin' the steam fitter's trade, and I'm sellin'. It's a long ways from now to when we were kids together. But when we were kids O'Hern could lick us all with his fists. And we can't forget it. So that though Pat can lick better men than O'Hern with the gloves, when it's O'Hern he's in front of he's no better than a ham."

"A cheese."

"Exactly."

"So that Pat will always be bate by this disease as sure as if he had the smallpox," commented Mr. Conley dolefully.

"He will unless we use psychology, too."

"How kin we do it?"

Here Martin smoothed back his black hair and straightened the green tie beneath his plump and rosy chin.

"I've been thinkin' of that, Mr. Conley," he admitted. "That's where every fighter, whether he's a professional or an amacher, needs a manager. The fighter uses his fists and the manager that what lies under his hat. Next month there comes the fights for the amacher championships, and it's up to me to find some way for Pat to bump off this gazoop, O'Hern."

A thoughtful silence ensued, broken at last by Conley, Sr., saying:

"'Tis strange that in this country, whin a man's not doin' well, people should spake of cheese. What is their objection to it? There is no food in the wur-ld a greater blessin', I'm thinkin', exceptin' pertaters."

Another silence followed, this time to be ended by the manager's speaking.

"I do not understand, Mr. Conley, why it is that a man should object to being called a cheese. But he does, as you know. So does Pat. There's nothing in the world he wouldn't rather be called. It's worrying him. The smack he got from O'Hern was all over in a few minutes, but the wallops he gets from being called a cheese last. After the fight some of the boys were a little sore. O'Hern belongs to the John L. Sullivan Club, as you know, Mr. Conley; and besides that the boys had bet their money on Pat, who they think is the better man. Pat heard some of 'em mentionin' cheese after the fight, and he's come to thinkin' they call him nothin' else now. He's got so bad he thinks Liola McDermott calls him by the same name behind his back. Now, you know Liola wouldn't call any one a name—and least of all, Pat. It's psychology workin' on Pat."

"It's too bad, too bad," commented Mr. Conley mournfully.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Martin, "I'm thinkin' it may be the savin' of Pat. The more he hears of cheese, maybe the better he'll fight. When he thinks everybody is callin' him, behind his back, Roquefort or Swiss or Camembert or Pimento or Gorgonzola, or maybe Limburger, he'll put up a terrible battle to stop it."

"'Tis true that Pat never cared much for furriners," admitted Mr. Conley.

"I'm figurin' on that," said Martin. "That's psychology, Mr. Conley, and it's something a manager don't want to forget."

But the senior Conley was dubious.

"We had fights, and many of them, in ould Ireland whin I was a boy," said he. "But never once do I remimber hearin' of this disease."

"Tut, tut, Mr. Conley," rejoined Manager Burke airily. "But begging your pardon, there's many a thing we have in this country and these times, they were completely ignorant of in the olden days."

III.

A WEEK before the bouts for the amateur championships there was a dinner at the Conley home, to which sat down with the family Miss Liola McDermott and Manager Martin Burke. Never did Mrs. Conley go to greater expense and care in preparing a meal and, as far as the food itself was concerned, never was she more successful. But despite her efforts a considerable shadow hung over the table.

The giving of the dinner with its two guests was due chiefly to Mr. Conley, Sr. For Pat, the oldest of the Conley offspring, was gloomy. Since the night with O'Hern, Pat had been a changed man. Pugnacious he had always been, from the cradle up; but despite the somewhat grim and solemn character of a natural fighting man, he had formerly had his softer moments.

He would unbend on occasions with those friends who questioned not his ability to overcome with the gloves any amateur performer his own weight. Most of all was he accustomed to unbend with the soft and pleasing Liola McDermott. But now, since O'Hern had met him on the chin, all this was changed. He glowered at former friends, and passed them by. He would neither call on Liola McDermott nor listen to her pleas over the telephone.

"Pat's feelin' bad," Conley, Sr., had said to Manager Burke in arranging for the dinner some days beforehand. "So does poor Liola. We'll bring them together as I've told you, and wid the help of a good feed

we'll have thim make up, and get Pat rid of this tur-rible disease."

But Burke, though he accepted the invitation, showed no great enthusiasm.

"This psychology works two ways," he explained. "Sometimes it kills but sometimes it cures."

Mr. Conley sighed.

"'Tis all very strange to me," he admitted. "I never knew a disease to work but one way."

The meal began with soup, of that body and flavor for which Mrs. Conley's soup was famous. There followed beefsteak, thick and tender; accompanied by a retinue of vegetables and side dishes that would have delighted any stomach. Yet the meal dragged.

Pat ate, but he did not talk. His jaws moved, but not in conversation. Poor Liola had been seated beside him, but she received no more attention from him than did Manager Burke, his parents, or his four younger brothers and sisters. They might talk among themselves, as they did, to some extent, at Mr. Conley's nudging and winking; but Pat remained glum, sour, indifferent to all but the victuals on his plate.

Once Mr. Conley urged upon Miss McDermott a second helping of creamed potatoes, one of Mrs. Conley's most famous dishes.

"Don't stint yerself wid these pertaters, Liola," advised Conley, Sr. "Pat likes thim this way, too. So it would be well, I'm thinkin', if you would learn from Mrs. Conley how to cook thim."

At Mr. Conley's wink, Liola blushed, glanced somewhat hopefully toward Pat, and was at the sight of that unresponsive and adamant young gentleman cast into complete dejection.

At the end came apple pie and coffee. Liola helped Mrs. Conley clear off the preceding course and bring on the last one; and all the while, with projected under-lip, Pat fixedly observed the exact center of the table cloth or the wall just above the head of Manager Burke, who sat opposite. Before each diner the two ladies serving set a piece of pie. At each right hand they placed a cup of coffee. The last thing to be served Mrs. Conley left to Liola.

Innocently Liola carried in her right hand a fork and in her left a plate upon which lay a dozen small and appetizing looking cubes. Innocently she went first to Pat, and with the fork placed one of the cubes beside Pat's pie.

There was on the way to Pat's mouth his first bite of pie, but this never reached its destination. With some clatter it was returned to the plate when Pat noted what Liola had placed there.

"Why Pat, what's the matter?" cried Liola as he pushed his chair away from the table.

"What's the matter?" repeated Conley, Jr., rising and in his anger reverting somewhat to the brogue of his ancestors. "Do ye think I don't see what ye've got speared on the end of that fork?"

"Why, Pat, it's only—"

"Only cheese! Ye're tryin' to insult me! Ye're tryin' to remind me of the night I had the bad luck with O'Hern! I heard ye call me a big cheese! And ye've been callin' me that ever since—every one of ye! I'm through with ye—all of ye! I'm goin'!"

With that Conley, Jr., marched from the table, out of the door of the house, and down the street.

The pie was forgotten, even by the youngest of the Conleys, and Mrs. Conley and Liola had grown somewhat pale.

"Shall I go after him?" asked Mr. Conley at last.

Manager Burke remained calm, as a manager always should.

"I wouldn't follow him," he said. "This may be the best thing for him when he sees O'Hern again. And as for you, Liola, you needn't worry. When he tips over O'Hern next week it'll be you he thinks of first."

"There's one thing certain," remarked Mr. Conley: "and that is he don't like O'Hern."

"Yes," agreed Manager Burke very slowly and thoughtfully. "But what's more, he don't like cheese!"

IV.

THE bouts for the amateur boxing championships were in progress. The largest

building of the city was packed with spectators, and had it been twice as large it could not have accommodated those persons who now kicked their heels on the sidewalks and street, unable to get within. No athletic club of the town but was represented in the audience, and every Pastime and every John L. Sullivan alive and well this day was on hand. For the John L's looked to O'Hern to repeat; while the Pastimes looked for him to do nothing of the kind.

Among the Pastimes, themselves, there was not altogether lacking criticism of those mental processes of Conley which, for three successive times, had permitted O'Hern to soak him on the chin; though, hearing them argue with the John L. Sullivans, it would have appeared that they believed the process reversed and that by some strange turn of luck Conley's chin had hurled itself upon O'Hern's fist.

The Conley-O'Hern bout was the last on the program. This was by general agreement, it being admitted on all hands that the two young gentlemen were the class of the amateurs of the town. A spirited fight was expected, and this in spite of the last three conflicts, each so unexpectedly ended by a sudden propulsion of O'Hern's fist—or of Conley's chin, according to how one viewed it.

All other bouts being concluded, the crowd awaited the final one. Manager Burke first appeared in the ring, carefully inspecting ropes, posts, floor, being determined to eliminate any intervention of the supernatural in favor of the lucky Mr. O'Hern.

Manager Burke was unusually serious. He was very anxious for Pat Conley to win. And upon his own responsibility he was calling in the aid of psychology.

The two young battlers entered the ring. The referee brought them together, and explained that they were to go four rounds to a decision—unless the affair happened to be decided before then. The two shook hands, and as they stood facing each other the crowd noted that O'Hern was a dark youth and Conley a red one, and that O'Hern looked very confident and Conley very grim.

Round One: From the first there was plenty of action, this being an amateur bout, and not a professional. Fists flew. Conley's red head bobbed about as blows landed on it, but no more than did his opponent's. The thump of gloves sounded like the beating of carpets. Across the ring the men rushed and back again, and if the red chased the black one instant, the operation was reversed the next. The crowd yelled. The referee panted from his exertions. Manager Burke, for once, forgot himself and chewed his nails. Never were two fighters more intent upon their business than were Conley and O'Hern when the bell rang for time.

There was a minute for recuperation between rounds. Both men breathed somewhat faster, but otherwise neither seemed in immediate need of repairs. It had been an even round and, excepting Pastimes and John L's, all spectators were agreed to that. To be safe, the seconds worked on the young gentlemen's legs and the managers assailed their ears. Conley sat glowering at his opponent; and if there appeared any advantage to either man at this time, it was in that O'Hern looked so cocksure concerning the future.

Manager Burke noted the look, and weighed its effect. Ten seconds before time was up he winked at Tom Thorpe sitting near the ringside; at which that individual muttered, low yet clear, the monosyllable:

"Cheese!"

Conley made a start in the direction of Thorpe.

"Forget it!" yelled Burke. "Take it out on O'Hern!"

Round Two: Immediately the fighters clashed in the middle of the ring. The blows fell faster than before. Their sound was now a tattoo on a drum. No carpet was ever beaten so thoroughly. In the hail of fists O'Hern's nose suffered. It bled, and the wonder was that no nose had bled before. But because of this there was no slowing up of the combatants; they seemed composed of iron and rubber.

Near the end of the round O'Hern did land the hardest blow of the battle, on Conley's ribs; and Conley immediately retal-

iated with its twin brother to the side of O'Hern's head. These two final mastodonic thumps resounded throughout the building like cannon shots concluding the musketry of lesser blows preceding.

The round had been Conley's, but O'Hern retained his confidence and Manager Burke was wary. Again, ten seconds before time was up in the intermission between rounds, the manager appealed to Thorpe, his aid at the ringside; and the latter acted.

Conley saw presented before him an object, in shape cylindrical, in color that of jaundice. He recognized it to be a small cheese; but before he could leap out of the ring toward Thorpe, Burke repeated:

"Forget it! Win *this* fight first!"

Round Three: If the opponents moved more slowly now they were the more in deadly earnest. Fewer hits were recorded, but each one as it landed was heard by the crowd without the building. And steadily Pat Conley seemed to be forging ahead. He hit harder, he was less shaken when he was hit.

It was near the middle of the round when Conley got in his famous one, two blow; a right to the body followed by a left to the jaw. O'Hern tried to retain his confident smile, but his ribs burned and his head hummed. Here was Conley's opportunity, it seemed; every Pastime advised him of it, while the assembled sons of Sullivan warned O'Hern to beware.

O'Hern dropped into a crouch and brought up his arms to protect his chin, so that there was little left for Conley to shoot at but the top of a cranium, covered by black hair and considerably harder than the average. This bobbing black mark Conley pursued; drove it into a corner twice, from which it escaped each time by diving and bobbing up again in the middle of the ring behind the pursuer.

The round was nearly over and had been overwhelmingly in favor of Conley. But here the unexpected happened. One of O'Hern's fists separated itself from the O'Hern cranium, which it had been carefully guarding, and hit the onrushing Conley cleanly on the chin.

Conley went down, and had not the bell

marking the end of the round rung just then, the fight would have been over. The bell gave him a minute to recover before Round Four, and his seconds dragged him into his corner to make the best of it. O'Hern, opposite, was also shaky and the cunning Manager Martin saw that the outcome of the battle now depended upon which man was in best shape at the beginning of the final round.

Furiously Burke and his assistant worked on Conley. Cold water was applied, legs and arms were rubbed, towels were swung. At the end of thirty seconds Conley's eyes were still glassy. In desperation Burke put smelling salts under Conley's nose trying to clear the muddled head. Fifteen seconds remained, and Conley was no better.

Burke reached into his pocket. He drew forth something wrapped in paper. He unwrapped it and clapped the contents to Conley's nose.

Five seconds remained, and Conley's eyes widened and he tried to catch his breath.

"Limburger!" he finally gasped.

"That's it: Limburger cheese!" hissed Burke. "And that's what you'll be the rest of your life if you don't win this fight!"

Burke had applied the incentive at exactly the right instant. Had not the bell for Round Four rung just then it is doubtful if Burke could have kept Conley in his corner another moment.

Round Four: Conley rushed toward his opponent. O'Hern was courageous, but in his minute of recuperation he had been subjected only to the ordinary methods of the prize ring. A lemon-colored specter drove Conley on to fight, and his eyes, ears and nose were full of it. O'Hern kept him busy, yet not so busy but that he was conscious of his yellow peril.

It worked upon his imagination. He saw himself passing through the years to come dogged and tortured by it. He knew what people would call him, that they would hold their noses at the mention of his name. The thought put springs in his legs and power in his fists. He was a cyclone, an avalanche, a ton of brick. He was an earthquake. O'Hern was no longer a match for him. John L. Sullivan would not have been. Crushing down O'Hern's defense

Conley caught his opponent on the jaw and knocked him down—and out.

V.

At the hall of the Pastime Athletic Club there gathered the members and their ladies to do honor to Champion Patrick Conley. The occasion was joyful, the company gayly stepped the fox trot, waltz and one-step to the strains of a cheerful orchestra, and among the dancers no couple received the attention that did Pat Conley and Miss Liola McDermott. Later, refreshments would be served; but just before that there would be a presentation.

At one end of a hall, upon a raised platform, rested the object which, in the name of admirers, was to be presented to the champion. Draped in the club colors this object defied all efforts to guess its nature. On the platform with it stood Mr. Tom Thorpe, prepared to resist any attempt of the too inquisitive. And Manager Burke cruised in the neighborhood.

At midnight dancing ceased, and all gathered about the platform, upon which stood Tom Thorpe and Manager Burke.

"Ladies and gents," said Burke: "As you know, we're all here to-night to do honor to Mr. Pat Conley, the champ of the amachers. Now, I don't want to take up your time talkin', because I know you want to get a little somethin' to eat, and then some more dancin' before you quit to-night. So I'll just conclude by saying that this object here beside me is a little present from some of the members of this club to the champ. And Mr. Tom Thorpe and I were

asked to present it. Mr. Thorpe, do your duty!"

From the object Tom Thorpe promptly withdrew the drapery—and then promptly stepped off the platform.

The object appeared. Of circular base, it was three feet high, and therefore in shape like the section of a great column, or a mighty smokestack, or a roundhouse. Its color, as it gleamed under the lights of the hall, was that of a full moon. There was no mistaking it for anything else than a tremendous cheese.

For an instant—just an instant—there was a dull glow in Conley's eyes and a bit of worry in Liola's.

But here Martin Burke showed the quick thinking that made him supreme among amateur managers as Pat was among the boxers. Stepping up to the monolith Burke smote it resoundingly with the flat of his hand and cried:

"It's all right, Pat. It's American cheese!"

The champion grinned. The crowd applauded. And it was Champion Conley who, with a great carving knife, cut slices from the cheese which were handed out to the gathering by Manager Burke, to be eaten with other refreshments of the evening.

The senior Mr. Conley, who was present, partook of the refreshments. Commenting upon his son and his son's manager, who moved about so efficiently on the platform before him, Mr. Conley said:

"Ah, he's a grand young man, is Martin Burke. And 'tis the furriner cheeses that Pat never liked."

THE END



THE 187TH NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

THE WHISPER ON THE STAIR

By LYON MEARSON

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The great disappointment of her life

HER SON—the boy she had hoped everything for! And yet every position he had held since leaving college proved only a stepping-stone into a new failure.

He was her wandering boy—wandering hopelessly from one job into another. But still she loved him.

But like so many mothers she was totally blind to the real reason back of her son's disappointments. Or if she did know she didn't have the heart to tell him.

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You, yourself, rarely know when you have halitosis (unpleasant breath). That's the insidious thing about it. And even your closest friends won't tell you.

Sometimes, of course, halitosis comes from some deep-seated organic disorder that requires professional advice. But usually—and fortunately—halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine as a mouth wash and gargle. It is an interesting thing that this well-known antiseptic that has been in use for years for surgical dressings, possesses these unusual properties as a breath deodorant.

Test the remarkable deodorizing effects of Listerine this way: Rub a little onion on your fingers. Then apply Listerine and note how quickly the onion odor disappears.

This safe and long-trusted antiseptic has dozens of different uses: note the little circular that comes with every bottle. Your druggist sells Listerine in the original brown package only—three sizes: three ounce, seven ounce and fourteen ounce. Buy the large size for economy.—Lambert Pharmaceutical Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.

For
HALITOSIS



use
LISTERINE

Black Jack

“that good old licorice flavor!”



“Aw gee!”

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